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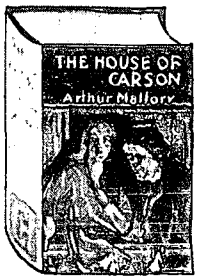

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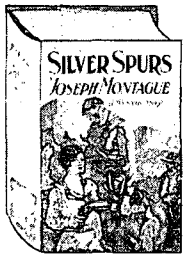

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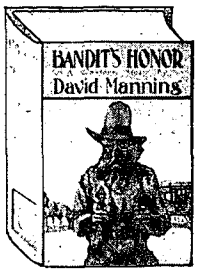

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WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

EVERY WEEK

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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXI JULY 30, 1927 No. 2

Tiger, Tiger

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "The Gentle Desperado," etc.

CHAPTER I.

FROM POST TO PILLAR.

IF you have seen Pedrillo Oñate in the days of his poverty, when he was kicked from pillar to post in the town of San Joaquin, it may be interesting to observe him now that his fortunes have changed. He stands in Pat McGuire's saloon, the leading drinking parlor in the town of Crawfordville, and holds the place of honor; that is to say, he keeps his post at the farther end of the bar, where he can turn his shoulder to the side wall and watch all who enter—and be watched from behind by no man. There are other men crowded before that bar and the bartenders are exceedingly busy. Teamsters and cow-punchers are there, enjoying the damp coolness of the place, for the floor is sprinkled every two hours with wet sawdust which is then swept out. The pungent odor of beer and the sour fragrance of rye whisky linger in the air, and every time the swinging doors are opened they cast a cloud of smoke before them, rolling it far into the saloon and sending it bulging out of the farther windows. For, of

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course, every one is smoking. Some smoke to give relish to the drinks. Some smoke to kill the taste of the cheap, poisonous liquor. There are ranchers, miners, lumbermen, tramps, fugitive yeggs and other criminals; officers of the law; outlaws of no vocation except battle; beggars, thieves, and confidence men. All these are crowded together in the saloon, and the deep sound of the voices of strong men rises and falls like the noise of waves along a beach.

There is another sound, steady as the dropping of water on the floor of a cave: the chime of silver and gold dropping into the three tills ever yawning to receive more coin. This musical chatter, small but clear, keeps steady pace with the music of the voices; when there is much talk, much confusion, much bustling and heaving and pushing in the crowd, then the clinking of money grows louder and steadier. What a steady tide of money is flowing into the pockets of Pat McGuire! In a month of such a trade as this, he must become a rich man, one would say. But as a matter of fact, there is a flaw, a leak, in the pocket of Pat. Across the street in Sweeney's place is a game of faro which never ceases, day or night; and once a week into Sweeney's place goes Pat McGuire, his pockets bulging with money. Once a week Pat is a rich man; once a week he comes back, humbled, weakened in spirit, poor in cash. Once a week he swears that never again will he attempt to beat the cursed game of faro; and once a week, certain as fate, he will wander back to the faro game across the street, scowl at it, curse it, snarl like a wounded wolf. But, before long he will be playing; before long he will be losing.

Pat McGuire is the greatest man in Crawfordville, the boldest, most famous spirit; and in his saloon all the celebrated people of the period and the range appear; but no one in that saloon catches the eye so clearly and quickly as does Pedrillo Oñate.

Standing there at the far end of the bar, he glows like a beautifully feathered tropical bird. And indeed, he is a mass of color and of metal. His lofty sombrero is banded around with heavy golden ornaments. It makes one's forehead burn even to think of enduring such a weight in such weather as this. He wears a jacket of yellow deerskin, threaded and chased with golden thread, and embossed with massy silver. It is a short jacket; for, otherwise, one might miss the miracle of crimson sash which engirdles his waist. Men say that the sacrilegious dog is wearing an altar-cloth, woven by the patient hands of Indians, a miracle of labor and of beauty. But to Pedrillo it is no more than a sash—a little ornament. His shirt is bluest of blue silk, buttoned down the front with golden buttons. It is open at the throat; and, lest the flaps of the shirt should fall apart too far, they are held loosely together with a delicate golden chain which supports in the center a great ruby. The boots of Pedrillo shine a dull, mahogany-red glow, his trousers are ornamented with solid silver conchos, and the holsters which support his two guns—what use has a one-armed man for two guns?—are of the purest white leather worked and chased with gold!

Oh, Pedrillo Oñate, what woman of your people could behold your magnificence, your shining, glorious presence, without completely opening her heart?

"Women are flowers," said the refulgent Pedrillo, "but alas, they wither in a day!"

His fat cheeks are still fatter, now, and glisten as though they had been coated with polish and rubbed hard. His black eyes seem blacker and brighter. And he smiles continually,

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out of the greatness of his sense of well-being.

There are other Mexicans in that crowd in Pat McGuire's saloon; and they are distinctly of the upper class. They are gentlemen. Yet they are little regarded. They are served last. They are slighted by their companions in the place, and most of all by the bartenders. They are shouldered and crowded to the wall.

How different it is with Pedrillo, though he has only one arm, though certainly he cannot pretend to gentle birth! Around him there is preserved a little space into which no man intrudes. All the rest of the bar is packed. But this portion is clear, open, free. And that is a little miracle.

Pedrillo pretends not to notice. But this little attention, this little tribute of fear and awe from the crowd are to his soul as the music of the spheres. He drinks tequila, slowly, sipping the white fire drop by drop, spending half an hour over a single glass. Others swallow whisky with a gulp before they are crowded from their places by thirstier drinkers. But Pedrillo takes his time, leaning his one elbow on the bar, at ease, cool, smiling, content. Of how many hundreds of dollars does he deprive Pat McGuire by taking so much time and so much space at that favored end of the bar?

Pedrillo likes to compute that loss. It amuses him.

Presently he says: "I'm taking up a good deal of room here. Shall I move along?"

The nearest bartender shakes his head violently.

"Stay where you are, Pedrillo," says he. "Anything wrong?"

"Oh, no, not at all," says Pedrillo, and returns to his glass of tequila. Meantime, his ears are busy listening to a hundred broken conversations, piecing them together, making of them the groundwork upon which he will rear a fabric of inventions later on. For of all the careless speakers in a country of careless speech, of all the gossips, the inventors, Pedrillo Oñate is the very greatest liar. His magnificent combinations, his glorious flights of fancy, his soul-stirring fabrications are unmatched in a country where even the children can tell such tales as make the listening angels shudder.

Yet the attitude of Pedrillo is not entirely that of a man who listens idly, gathering gossip as a humming bird gathers the honey of a blossom. In it there is something more narrowly attentive. There is an air of eagerness and an air of patient expectation combined. Study the face of a fisherman, and you will see the same expression.

For what does he wait there? For what is he fishing, this transfigured and radiant Oñate?

Presently, out of the crowd comes a fellow dressed like any cow-puncher; a man of middle age, with fat jowls, a hawk nose, and eyes glittering with a wonderful brightness. Even a dog could have guessed that this was a man of evil. But Oñate did not seem to care. He noted the approach of the other from the corner of his eye, and pretended to heed the newcomer not at all. But that was not the truth. His expectant attitude had ceased. His expression had changed. Oñate now has a fierce glitter in his eye, a fierce but contented glitter, so that he looks no longer like the merely idle fisher. Now he has something on the hook.

Once, twice, and again the man of the hook nose and the bright eyes looks earnestly at Oñate. Then he comes closer. He steps into the little enchanted clearing which surrounds the Mexican. He waits, almost reverently, quietly, his eyes attentive. Still Pedrillo pays no heed!

And, all the time, like a hawk watching a sparrow, Pedrillo is watching this newcomer, judging him, regarding

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especially the size of a diamond ring upon his finger.

At length, the stranger steps briskly up to the bar and looks Pedrillo in the eye.

"You're Pedrillo Oñate, I guess," says he.

"I am," says Pedrillo.

"Well, then," says the stranger, "I think we can do business together. And back yonder is a little empty room where we can talk. Come along!"

When he had said this, he turned on his heel and walked straight toward the little back room which he had designated. Pedrillo stared. He wanted to follow, because he felt that this interview might be much to his advantage. But on the other hand, he did not like the assured manner in which this white man led the way, confident that Pedrillo would follow. It angered Oñate. It made him frown. But curiosity was stronger than resentment, and presently he walked, scowling, on the heels of the stranger and into the little back room.

CHAPTER II.

THE WORD OF A GENTLEMAN.

HOW strange it was to see the completeness with which all diffidence vanished from the manner of the unknown! He sat at his ease among the shadows of the farthest corner, and rolled a cigarette. This he lighted, and through the dimness and the smoke which he puffed forth, he examined Pedrillo closely—without malice but without friendship.

"Oñate," said he suddenly to the frowning Mexican, "do you know me?"

"No."

"I'm Sim Burgess of the Big Bend. Does that help you?"

"No," said Pedrillo, growing more and more haughty.

"Very well," said Sim Burgess, "I'll tell you a little bit about myself. You'll find it pretty interesting. I've got a big piece of land staked out down in that part of the world. Me and a partner staked it out, stocked it with cattle, and worked it into a going ranch. We worked like brothers. He's my heir, and I'm his heir. We wrote out that one will and we filed it away in a bank. Neither of us could change it. Neither of us could take that will out of the bank vault without the permission of the other man. You understand? Now, Pedrillo, we had a little falling out. No matter about what. Each of us thought that the other fellow was wrong. And so we had that falling out. He got more of the boys behind him. I was run off the place. You understand? Well, he gives me a pension but he won't let me come back. You understand? I have to stay away and live like a dog on the two or three thousand a year that he sends to me. Now, Pedrillo, you can see where you come in. You get him shot for me, and I hand you a big wad of dough. Is that clear? Is that simple? You get him shot for me, and I get the ranch, because the double will will hand it to me. You get a big chunk of handy coin. Now, how does that sound to you?"

Pedrillo rolled a cigarette—it was a miracle to see how he manipulated the paper, the sack of tobacco and all, with one hand, rolling the cornucopia-shaped smoke with a single twist—and thrust it into his mouth. He lighted it. Through the smoke which he presently sent upwards in great exhalations, he studied the idea which had been presented to him.

"Your partner is Pete McCoy," said Pedrillo.

Sim Burgess nodded.

"McCoy is a grand fighting man."

"Yes."

"That makes the price high, señor."

"Of course. I understand that."

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"And then, it is a big ranch, I think. I have heard about it."

"It's not so big as you've heard, maybe."

"You make fifteen thousand dollars a year on that place, señor."

"It's a lie," said the other, "we've never cleared more than twelve!"

Then he bit his lip, because by the smile of the Mexican he saw that he had been tricked into giving important statistics. "And that was our banner year; we've never had another like it," he added.

The smile of Oñate was radiant as before. He ordered drinks and tasted his before he would speak more about business.

"I think that we shall agree, señor," said he. "I never believe in a hard bargain. I know that people must live. They cannot be taxed too heavily. But still, this is a great affair. Twelve thousand dollars a year income; many hundreds of good cows on the ranch—to say nothing of the fine land which may be developed—and I suppose that the whole property might come to a value of about a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And you are shut away from that ranch. You only get a part of the income. And the pity of it is that you cannot even leave the property to a son, because you have no children!"

"Now how do you know that if you don't know me?" asked the rancher sharply.

Pedrillo smiled again. There was a good deal of devilishness in that smile of his, and some share of humor.

"Marriage writes its own story in the face," said Pedrillo. "However, señor, you want that ranch in your hands. Before you have had it a year, there will not be much left for the heirs of Señor McCoy. And then you can retire. Am I not right?"

Sim Burgess threw away his cigarette and folded his hands across his chest, saying: "You go on talking. Keep it up till you're tired. You're sort of funny to listen to."

"Ah, very well," said Pedrillo, waving his fat hands airily. "We become good friends. I can understand you. You can understand me. There is nothing to be wished for. All that I have to do is to strike a price with you. Suppose that we say twenty thousand dollars for this job, señor?"

Sim Burgess rose slowly from his chair, as one partly startled, and partly dismayed. It seemed as though he were being dragged upward by the hair. Standing above the Mexican, he stabbed a finger vaguely toward him a few times, as one not yet able to speak. "Twenty thousand," said he at last. "Are you nutty?"

"Or fifteen thousand," said Pedrillo gently, seeing that he had overstepped himself a little.

"Oñate," said Mr. Burgess hotly, "I'll pay fifteen hundred for this job. Does it sound good to you?"

Pedrillo waved the unhappy idea away.

"Let us finish our drinks," said Pedrillo. "Let us have another round at my expense if you will. But let us talk business no longer."

Mr. Burgess lost some of his fury and began to argue; first he tapped off his points, forefinger on palm; then he smashed them off with a clenched fist.

"What's hard about it? A little trip. Just a fine little jog. Then you meet up with McCoy. He's got a temper strung on a hair-trigger. You touch him and he explodes. But of course he wouldn't have a chance against your man. And, well, Oñate, ain't it perfect for you? I know your Fernald. He's a sort of half-wit. Hunting for action and trying to do good, like something out of a kid's book. Well, he runs into this perfect set-up for him. Ain't it easy? Here's me that have been kicked out of a

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partnership by a big brute of a gun fighter like McCoy. Why, what more could Fernald want if his tongue is hangin' out to do a good deed? You tell me, kid. You tell me, will you? I'll listen! You've got your spiel made up for you! Why, I could've gone straight to him and told him the sad story. I wouldn't 've had to pay a cent!"

"The way is open, señor," said Pedrillo with a wave of his fat brown hand. "You have still a good chance to speak to him."

Mr. Burgess hurled himself into his chair and scowled. He made another cigarette and then rubbed it to pieces between his fingers. He sat up, and then he slid down. Twice he began to speak, and finally he said: "Aw, I understand. You queer any deal except the ones that you promote. Look here, Oñate, I'll stand for five thousand, but that's the upper limit."

"Fifteen thousand, I said," replied Oñate. "I take my life in my hands. I go to Señor Fernald and tell him a sad story about you. I tell him that you are wronged, that you are—— Well, my dear friend, after he has killed McCoy, what if he learns the truth?"

"What truth?" asked Burgess, growing more ugly than before.

"That you are—why, señor, let us remain polite!"

Sim Burgess grew crimson with passion; but, after all, he was a business man. He put his pride in his pocket, saying: "You talk free and loud, Oñate. I'll tell you. I'll raise the ante a little. I'll make it ten thousand flat."

"I split the difference with you," said the Mexican graciously. "I am not a robber. But one must live, señor. I split the difference and call the price twelve thousand five hundred dollars."

Mr. Burgess drummed his fingers against his chin, but at length he nodded.

"All right," he sighed. "But you've got a nerve with you! Twelve grand for—well, I'm the sucker! When do you start?"

"Before to-morrow morning. And now to bind the agreement, señor?"

"To bind the agreement? Here's five hundred, Oñate."

"Thank you," said Oñate, and, deliberately, he spread out the bills and counted them. "Correct," said he. "Five hundred and that diamond ring, señor?"

"This?" cried Burgess. "Oñate, I'd hate to tell you what kind of a shark you are. By heaven, I would! But the fact is——"

"Yes, señor?"

"Well, take it and be hanged!"

He tossed the ring on the table and Oñate picked it up between fat thumb and fat forefinger. It was a deep little well of light; and it threw a radiance even to the inmost heart of the Mexican. It would not fit except on the little finger, and there he placed it; and turned his hand gently back and forth, admiring, it seemed, the deep wrinkles at the wrist.

"This will do very well," said the Mexican.

"Will it?" snarled Burgess. "Now you tell me, will you, what sort of surety *I* get that the job will be done?"

Oñate raised his eyes reluctantly from the brilliance of the jewel.

"Ah, señor," he murmured at length, "as for that, you have the word of a gentleman!"

So he said, and returned his attention to the ring; while Burgess rose and went slowly out into the broad, bright flare of the sun. Not until he had reached the outdoors did the full sting of the Mexican's last sentence enter his mind. He turned as if to go back, but again he altered his purpose and merely shrugged his shoulders, like a good gambler who has risked his last stake upon a long shot.

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CHAPTER III.

PEDRILLO IN ACTION.

SOMETHING has been said about the gifts of Oñate as a natural liar. Now there is a chance to see him in practice. Observe him, therefore, at work in the presence of his master. He sits with his head in his hand, sighing profoundly. And here is Robert Fernald, whom the years cannot change, the sun cannot tan, and the deeds of his life cannot make older. Grave, simple, earnest, looking on wide-eyed at life, he has evidently been cast in a mold which cannot be altered without breaking.

"What is wrong, Pedrillo?"

"It is for the evil that I find in the world that I sigh, señor," says Pedrillo.

"That is true," replies Robert Fernald mournfully.

"But what would the señor say of a man good, sincere, brave, and honest, who becomes the partner of a villain, builds up a great ranch, loves his partner like a brother, so that he agrees to a mutual will in which each leaves all his property to the other, and then—alas, little father, I cannot tell you!"

"That is the picture of a good man, full of trust," says Robert, much moved. "Tell me more, Pedrillo!"

"Will you believe that there can be such a villain? Yet I tell you on my honor, the scoundrelly partner gathers the men of the ranch together, bribes them and fills their minds with poison, and then drives away the honest man! Think of this, señor! With bribery and treachery he corrupts the men of the ranch—they drive out the good man whose brains and whose money have made the ranch rich——"

Robert rose from his chair. He was stiff with indignation. His chin was high in air.

"What is the name of this devil of a man, Pedrillo?"

"Señor Don Peter McCoy."

"I shall remember! Where can he be found?"

"In the Big Bend, señor."

"Would it not be a good work, Pedrillo, to find this cur and rid the world of him?"

"Ah, little father, think what you say! To risk your life—because he is a terrible fighter——"

"Is he?" says Robert Fernald softly, gripping his slender hands into fists. "Is he such a terrible man?"

"Ah, señor, the list of those he has slain——"

"He is a great man with guns, Pedrillo?"

"Ah, yes! If you were to stand against him, it would simply be death to you, señor!"

"A man may die only once," said Robert Fernald gravely, "and why not in a good cause?"

"What have I done?" cries Pedrillo, the cunning one. "No, little father, I never shall cease——"

"I have decided!" declared Robert Fernald firmly. "Learn where the ranch is to be found in the Big Bend. Then bring me word of it at once!"

"No, no! We now are on the way to Larkin Valley, where you long ago had promised to be——"

"I have made up my mind, Pedrillo. Nothing can change me! Who is the poor man who was driven away from his rights?"

"Señor Burgess. The world knows that he is an honorable man."

"Your word is enough for me. Hurry, Pedrillo. Find out everything. Let me know at once."

"Ah, little father, I beg you to think! I shall be an unhappy man forever! What will poor Pedrillo do when——"

"Go, go!"

So, with seeming reluctance, Pedrillo was driven from the room. Once outside the door, he shrugged his shoulders, took on a different appearance,

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and went smilingly down to the street where, at the first corner, he encountered Burgess.

"Greaser," said Sim Burgess, "what's been arranged?"

Pedrillo overlooked the insulting nickname.

"It is finished," said he, "except that the coffin for Señor McCoy has not been ordered. But you will attend to the burial, my friend?"

"You've got Fernald on the job?" asked Burgess, his eyes glittering with pleasure and excitement.

"He is eager to go. He is filled with a terrible compassion for the wrongs which you have suffered, señor. He burns when he thinks of the scoundrel McCoy!"

Burgess grinned, slowly and wickedly.

"Now, keep the kid under cover all the way to the Big Bend," said he. "Don't let him have too much air, for if you do, he'll hear something that'll poison his mind. He'll hear folks talking about McCoy, and damn me if ever you hear anything against him. He's got people hypnotized!"

"I shall take him," said Pedrillo, "by such ways that even the eagle hardly knows them. We shall not meet others by the trail I travel!"

Burgess grinned again.

"I dunno," said he, "but somehow I feel as if the ranch was in my pocket already. Tell me, Pedrillo, how it comes that your boss never sees the inside of a jail, the number of fights that he's been in?"

"There is a simple reason. He does not fire until the other man draws a gun. And he rarely kills. A shoulder or a hip is his target."

"Is it?" murmured Burgess. "But this is different. A wounded McCoy ain't a thing to me. It's a dead man that I want!"

"He is dead already," said Pedrillo. "And before we come to the ranch, Señor Fernald will wish for nothing in life except to kill this scoundrel!"

And he looked down to the glittering diamond upon his finger.

"If you was to double cross me," said Burgess, filled with a new emotion, "there wouldn't be nothin' in the world that would keep me from you, old-timer. I'd just nacherally have to hunt you down, even if you was to lay a trail clean around the world. You understand?"

"Nothing could be clearer. But you forget—my master never fails!"

"If he should slip——"

"I return you the money and the ring. That is settled!"

"Pedrillo," said Mr. Burgess, "of all the low-down crooks in the world, you take the prime prize. But suppose, Oñate, only suppose, that your boss was to get half an idea of the sort of a gent that you really are?"

Pedrillo glanced over his shoulder, as though in dread lest this speech might have been heard. And moisture broke out on his forehead. However, he regained his confidence at once.

"Señor," said he, "he would kill me over a slow fire. But that time never shall come. I can lead him with a silk thread—with a spider's thread."

"Tell me one thing, Oñate. What's in the head of Fernald?"

"Books, señor. He does not think. He simply remembers printed words which he has read."

Here they parted; and Burgess wandered slowly down the street, hurrying a little through the patches of burning sun, and loitering through shadow. His mind was far in the future. Already he had the sense of great property. It was placed literally within the grip of his hands and he had only to close his fingers over it. He saw himself established as the ruler of a domain like the domain of a prince. And he flattered himself that even if he were not a miracle of industry like

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McCoy, at least he would be able to hire the proper people to run the place for him.

In the midst of these thoughts a voice hailed him, a voice straight out of the heart of his dream, and Burgess, with a start and a groan, whirled and blinked up at a tall, lean, brown-faced man who had reined a mustang to that side of the street.

"McCoy!" murmured Burgess. "Good Lord, what are you doing down here?"

"Why shouldn't I be here?" asked McCoy, stern and cold. "Now that I've seen you, I want to talk business with you."

"Come over here to the saloon," said Burgess.

"I don't want to talk to you over liquor," answered McCoy, with a certain amount of disdain. "I want to talk business, not old times."

"Then fire away."

"I want the ranch."

"That's a funny thing. So do I."

"There's a difference, though."

"I don't see it."

"I'll pay for what I want—and you'll only steal what you want!"

Burgess scowled, shifted in his place, and then changed his mind. He said, sullenly: "Look here, are you gunna stop here only to insult me, McCoy?"

"I don't want to insult you. I was simply showing you a difference. Now, Burgess, I want you to listen to some hard facts."

"Go ahead, then. I'll listen."

"I'll pay you fifty thousand for your share in the ranch."

"You will! And you makin' between twelve and fifty thousand a year—and every year more! You'll pay me fifty thousand?"

"Don't be a fool, Sim. I make that money by hard work."

"So could I. But you run me off of the ranch! What chance have I got to show you what I could do with the place?"

"You showed it long ago. The year that you worked it with me, we had a deficit. You know that. You threw away money right and left; you fired the best hands or made them so sore that they quit. You spoiled everything that you tried."

"That's what you think. Simply because my way ain't yours!"

"The proof of the pudding is the eating. After you quit, I made the ranch pay; when you were there, everything went to ruin. Now, Sim, I'm offering you a nice fat sum. Fifty thousand can bring you in three thousand a year, dead easy. Do you want it, or don't you?"

"Is three thousand half of twelve? No! You want to rob me, McCoy."

McCoy started to speak and again changed his mind.

He reined back his horse into the street.

"I've made you a proposition," he said, "and you can think it over for a while. I'm gunna be in town for a few days. You can find me and tell me what you want to do."

So saying, he turned his horse and rode it up the street, a stiff, erect figure in the saddle, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Burgess looked after him with disgust and with awe commingled. For he never had been able to understand the power that was in the honesty of his partner. There was no subtlety in McCoy. There was no cleverness. He simply did what every other rancher tried to do. Except that McCoy worked longer hours, took fewer chances; and lived, dreamed, hoped, prayed, labored only for the success of his ranch.

And yet the awe remained in Burgess, though he despised the starved existence of his partner. He sneered, but he envied at the same moment. And though he would not have changed

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lives with McCoy, how gladly would he have exchanged accomplishments!

There was a solution to all his difficulties, however. And he tapped the butt of his Colt. Not that he would use a gun. But by a gun should this dispute be put to an end.

CHAPTER IV.

EAVESDROPPING.

THERE was great haste in Sim Burgess now. He wanted to get to the Mexican at once so he hurried back to the hotel. There he was informed that Pedrillo had left the hotel, and that his master, Robert Fernald, was now in his room, having given orders to have his bill prepared for he was leaving at once.

All this was very well; but Sim Burgess wanted nothing less than the departure of these two for the Big Bend, now that their quarry was in the town. He went to the stables. Oñate was not there. He returned in a froth of impatience to the veranda of the hotel and sat down there to wait.

While he waited, he saw McCoy come out on the veranda, and stand tall and silent by the pillars near the steps. He looked up and down the veranda, impassive, unhurried, always intent on some purpose. And no one on the veranda spoke to him. He was not a person to be lightly addressed.

Without moving, without rolling a cigarette, without stirring from his place even to lean against one of the wooden pillars, that statue of a man remained on watch. And now he had the reward of his patience, for a little cavalcade came riding down the street: three men and two women—three hardy cow-punchers with all the signs of their calling about them, and two women of whom the one rode like a true daughter of the West, with a fine, free, careless swing, and the other was elderly, and mounted on a side-saddle on a long-limbed thoroughbred. Such a cavalcade would have drawn more than a passing glance in any city; in this little town it became the cynosure of all eyes, and Sim Burgess, forgetting the hopes and plans which were revolving in his mind, came to the edge of the veranda and watched the newcomers.

They halted at the hotel; two of the men took the horses, and the third, with the two women, entered the hostelry. Sim Burgess, and all the idlers near by, strolled casually in to hear what they could hear and see what they could see—particularly the face of the girl. For she was a black-eyed beauty with such a store of good spirits that she smiled continually. No shrinking, timid, bashful girl of the range was she, abashed by the stares of so many men; with a keen glance she gave back their regards, and looked them over from head to foot, after the fashion of one who knows men and how to judge them.

The idlers and Sim Burgess heard her ask the proprietor if there were a guest in his hotel under the name of Robert Fernald.

"Robert Fernald is here, ma'am," said the proprietor. "I suppose you've heard a good deal about him?"

"I'll tell a man I've heard a good deal about him!" said the girl. "And I've ridden all the way from the mountains to see him."

All the way from the mountains—those enchanting, cool, blue heaps against the far-off sky! All that distance to see young Robert Fernald! The air suddenly tingled with the spice of romance and excitement. What could have brought her?

"Dan," she said to the big fellow who had been signing the register, "will you try to find Robert and bring him to our room? Come along, Aunt Harriet, will you?"

She and Aunt Harriet went up

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the stairs, and Dan followed them, guided by the fat proprietor who had huddled himself into a coat in order to do honor to these new guests. The room of Sim Burgess, by chance, stood next to that of Robert Fernald, who spent most of his time in his chamber; busy, rumor had it, with a book, or spending hours and hours in studious practice with his guns, drawing and pointing at a crack in the door, or at a nail head, or at a rift in the ceiling, and going through his maneuvers seated or standing, or walking to and fro and whirling to aim again.

It would have been folly in another person. It was not folly in Robert Fernald, but a necessary protection; for did he not have deadly enemies here and there through the entire course of the mountain-desert? How many had he struck down with bullets, how many had he turned into mortal foes—brothers or fathers or cousins or friends of his fallen men? Therefore he must spend these hours at practice with his weapons, and if he dared to relax or give over the work, then he would fall. Fall he must, sooner or later. So declared rumor; so announced tradition. For those who live by the gun must die by the gun. That is the law of the West!

Mr. Sim Burgess hurried up to his room, therefore, keen with curiosity to learn what was about to happen behind the paper-thin partition which separated his chamber from that of the gun fighter. He paused only to glance at the hotel register, and there he found inscribed the names of Harriet Atkinson, Daniel Parker, and Beatrice Larkin.

Beatrice Larkin! That linked up suddenly with the tradition which had to do with Robert Fernald. It rather took the breath of Burgess. So many tales had been breathed across the desert of the wild exploits of this mild-faced youth that one grew to thinking of them rather as fancies than as facts. And here was a legend which seemed to have a body—that legend which told how Robert Fernald had gone to Larkin Valley and there had captured Tom Gill, whose cattle rustling promised to break the girl who had inherited Larkin Valley from her famous father.

With this idea tucked away in his mind, Burgess reached his chamber. He did not enter it in a rush, for all his haste; but with a soft-footed ease, such that any casual passerby would have shrewdly suspected him of being a thief. Like a thief, then, he entered his own room, making not a sound. And there he took a chair and sat still as a mouse.

That done, it was easy enough for him to hear everything that passed in the adjoining room. The occupants barely had exchanged their first greetings, and Robert Fernald was saying that he was glad to see Dan Parker, and saying it in such a voice that it seemed as though he meant it.

"Now look here, old-timer," Parker was saying, "it's a queer fact that Larkin Valley can't get along without you. I've come down here to take you back."

"I'd like to go," said Robert Fernald. "And as a matter of fact, there's no other place in the world where I'd be half so glad to go. I want to go there, and to the grave of my father, Dan. But just now I can't."

"You're tied down?"

"Yes."

"Got some big job on hand?"

"Yes," said Robert earnestly.

"Life and death matter?"

"Yes, it is."

"You couldn't tell me about it?" said Dan Parker at last, in an oddly dry voice.

"I can't, Dan. It's not a thing that I can talk about very well. I'm not held back by any promise. But the fact is—it's a very private affair."

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Sim Burgess, listening, quaked in his boots. For if this mission to which he had inspired Robert Fernald should be known, his own life would probably he ended by the hands of a lynching party.

"This private affair—it means that you're going off on a death-trail, Fernald!"

Robert was silent.

"Of course it means that. But look here, old fellow. Miss Beatrice has come down here a long ways——"

What a ring came into the voice of Robert Fernald!

"She has come! Come here?"

"She has."

"For me, Dan?"

"Yes, for you."

"Is it possible!" cried Robert Fernald.

But before he could say more, there came a light tap at his door.

"Come in!" called Robert.

Then the door creaked, and a breath of silence followed, after which the eavesdropper heard Fernald say in a husky voice: "Miss Larkin, I'm so happy—I mean surprised—I mean—how do you do—and won't, won't you sit down—and——"

"Bobbie," said the voice of a girl, laughing, "you *are* the silliest child in the world. Sit down yourself. You look much more in need of support!"

CHAPTER V.

'LEVEN DEAD MEN ON A LIVE MAN'S CHEST.

SIM BURGESS, listening, forgot his recent terrors and was convulsed with silent laughter, still more when he heard this most simple and most terrible of gun fighters stammering: "But I mustn't sit down, you know. It isn't polite—I mean, when there is a lady——"

"Bobbie," said the girl, "you're coming to Larkin Valley with me."

"I, Miss—I mean, Beatrice—I—of course it's a thousand times kind of you to ask me—but the fact is—I have to do a little work——"

"For whom?"

"For a good and just man who has been deprived of——"

"Something by a villain?"

This crisp voice of the girl seemed to scatter the dreamy thoughts of Robert Fernald.

"The fact is, Beatrice," he added suddenly, "this is a terrible case of cruelty and ingratitude——"

"And you have to kill somebody, accordingly?" she asked.

"I don't know——" said Robert, "as a matter of fact——"

"Tell me yes or no? Are you going out to commit murder?"

"Murder? Good heavens!" cried Robert.

"But tell me—isn't that what you intend to do?"

"Ah, Beatrice, how can you ask me such a thing?"

"Because I've heard enough about the things that you've been doing. Knocking off ninety per cent of the stuff for gossip and lies, that leaves ten per cent. Strike out half of that as exaggeration, and subtract another twenty-five per cent of the cases because they've been good ones—but there still remains a considerable list of murders at your door, Robert Fernald!"

"I've never heard of such a thing!" breathed Robert.

"Of course you haven't," said the girl, "because everybody in the world is afraid of you and afraid to tell you the truth about yourself!"

"Beatrice, will you try to believe me when I say that——"

"That you never shot a man through the back? Of course I'll believe that! That doesn't make your killings anything but murder nevertheless!"

"I don't understand," said Robert.

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"You accuse me of murdering—but that is a terrible word, Beatrice!"

"Robert Fernald, how many men have you fought?"

"Not very many, really, only——"

"Well, I'll leave out the men you have wounded or shot down with your devilish skill. I'll count only the deaths. How many dead men lie at your door?"

"I—I don't know, Beatrice," said Robert faintly. "Very, very few, I hope and trust!"

"You hope and trust!" said the girl scornfully. "Well, I can tell you of a few. There was that poor fellow in El Paso, young Gregory, whom you shot down in the street. And there were the Tucker boys in Idaho, and Charlie and Brent Hotchkiss in Butte City, and Lambert and King and the old——"

"Don't!" said Robert.

A little silence followed this.

And then Robert Fernald added: "They were wicked men, Beatrice. And every one of them had more than a fair chance."

"What do you call a chance?" asked the girl. "You give them a chance to make the first move to their guns. But they are people who haven't nerves as keenly strung as yours. Their hands can't move as fast. And perhaps they have something to do other than practice with weapons all day long. You say that you give them a chance; but I'll tell you, Bobbie, that to pit you against most men is like pitting a wolf against an ordinary dog. The dog may be bigger than the wolf, but he can't live ten seconds against the biting of a lobo. Bobbie, you've killed eleven men—and I make no count of the rumors which give you a lot more. I make no count, either, of the Indians and the Mexicans. But you've killed eleven white men!"

"Eleven villains!" cried Robert. "Really, you must grant that!"

"Who judged them villains?" asked the girl angrily.

"Why, every one knew——"

"Are you twelve men and a judge, all by yourself?" asked Beatrice Larkin. "What right have you to judge men?"

Another silence, terribly heavy, followed.

"Beatrice," said Fernald at last, "you are very hard on me. I've always wanted to do only what's right!"

She said ironically: "I suppose that that's all you've been wanting to do—just help the weak and the defenseless—like a knight out of a book?"

"I—really—I wanted to help those that couldn't help themselves."

"We have a law in this land to help such people."

"Yes," said Robert, "but, in this district—isn't it rather weak?"

"Perhaps it is, but does that give any one man the right to take the law into his own hands? It does not. You ought to know it. You're a college graduate."

"I do know it," said Robert, more faintly than ever. "But——"

"What do people say about you now?"

"I don't know," asked Robert. "Will you tell me?"

"You bet I'll tell you! They say you're a professional gunman."

"No, no!"

"They say you make your living with your guns."

"It isn't——"

"Then how *do* you make a living?"

"Beatrice, I've never taken any sum of money for a killing——"

"But when you've downed a man, you let his enemies make you a present—of a fine saddle—a bridle all covered with gold—a magnificent Mexican sombrero—a glorious diamond. You take those presents and then you say, like a hypocrite, these things are much too fine and gay for me. I'm only a

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simple, quiet fellow. You sell those gifts as a matter of course—and you use the money for living. Tell me, Bobbie, if that isn't a fact?"

He looked vaguely, almost helplessly at her.

"And that's blood-money," said the girl, fiercely.

"I never thought of it like that," said he.

"Of course you didn't. But isn't it the truth?"

"I want to think it over," said poor Robert Fernald.

"Ask other people," said the girl. "Ask Dan, won't you? Is Dan Parker an honest man?"

"I don't want to be in on this," protested Dan Parker.

"Don't back down, Dan," urged the girl. "Tell him straight from the shoulder."

"Why, then," said Parker, "I suppose there's a good deal in what you've been telling Fernald."

"They think that I'm just—a murderer?" cried Robert.

There was no direct answer to this, and it seemed that silence was a sufficient speech.

Finally the girl said: "I've come for you, and I'm going to have you, Bobbie. I'm going to start back for the ranch to-morrow morning, and I'm going to take you with me."

"I want to think a little——" began Robert.

"Go out and walk around the block. We'll wait for you right here," she replied.

Presently Sim Burgess heard Robert leave the adjoining room. His first impulse was to hurry after his man of the guns and hurry him out of town on the blood trail. But he was greatly tempted to remain where he was and hear whatever might be said between the girl and Parker. He could remember, now, that Parker was the foreman in Larkin Valley, and a man held in the highest trust by the girl who employed him.

"You bore down on him pretty hard," said Parker, after Fernald was gone.

All her surety seemed to have left her. She said in a trembling voice: "Do you think that we'll be able to get him, Dan? What do you think?"

"I dunno," replied Parker. "He's got something on his mind!"

"It's the Mexican who leads him around by the nose from one deviltry into another; and sooner or later Pedrillo will get him killed. I know it! I've been dreaming it all this time. We've got to take him with us, Dan," said Beatrice.

"It's a pretty important job to you?" asked Parker.

"Well," said the girl, "you think it out for yourself. Of course it's important to me."

"But there's Larkin Valley as quiet as can be," said Dan Parker. "There ain't even so much as a mouse stirring up there without permission. I dunno that you got any great need for a gunman like Fernald, Miss Beatrice."

"You silly man!" said she, and laughed a little—a very uneven, uncertain laugh.

"Is that the way of it?" murmured Parker's gruff voice.

"Of course it is," said she.

"Humph!" said Parker. "But I'll tell you this. You'd no sooner get married to him, than one of his old enemies would turn up ready to fight. You'd be a widow almost before you was a wife."

"I'll guard him like a handful of diamonds," replied Beatrice Larkin. "Hush! Here he comes!"

Robert came hastily back to the room. He spoke in a sharp, broken voice: "Beatrice, I want to go back with you. But I've given my word of honor to another man. I have to try to help him. And then——"

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CHAPTER VI.

A FACE IN THE WINDOW.

THE instant that Sim Burgess made sure his gun fighter par excellence was so devoted to his word of honor; he, Sim, determined that he must prepare to have the blow struck before the iron was a single degree cooler. No matter what the pull of duty and honor might be to this deluded Fernald, Burgess had a great deal of trust in the power of a girl as beautiful as Beatrice Larkin to do as she pleased with almost any man. For his own part, it seemed to Burgess the height of insanity for a grown man to dare to cross a single wish of such a beauty. She held in her hand a fortune great enough to enrich a dozen. And upon this fortune, Fernald was at present turning his back.

Well, whatever madness induced Fernald to act in this fashion, Burgess was certain that he must make the most of his ally's assistance during the next few hours, for otherwise the golden opportunity might well be lost. The girl had browbeaten and scoffed at Fernald up to this point. If she once descended to appeal there would be an end of Burgess' fine scheme, and Robert Fernald would be whirled away to Larkin Valley, to peace and happiness for the rest of his life.

That was the reason for the haste of Burgess. When he got into the lobby of the hotel, however, he had to pause, for there was news sufficient to make any Westerner open his ears.

A most notorious character had arrived in town: Tiger Brennan, famous for a thousand wild and brutal acts—Tiger Brennan and his coterie of trained assistants. Trained, in fact, by the hand of the master, so that they would be useful in the performance of any act of crime that might prove profitable. There had been a time when Brennan roamed the range alone, doing whatever his patron, the devil, put into his mind; but that old and careless period had ended, and Brennan had learned how to make crime earn something more than various terms in jail.

He stood there in the corner of the lobby, surrounded, as always, by a crowd. The majority were more interested, idle spectators, and, with a single glance Burgess could pick out the cohorts of Brennan from the rest. Three tall, straight, lean-faced, young men with restless eyes and sternly set mouths, they showed that their master had selected them with care and trained them with patience. They were the remainder of a larger company. How many crimes were committed by these same youngsters, men only could guess. They were not constantly busy. It was said that Brennan planned every job with the utmost care, and that he struck but once.

Nothing was too big for him to undertake. Nothing was too small, if his pride were enlisted in a difficult undertaking. It was said that he had robbed trains, banks, messengers, stages. But nothing could be proved. Hardly a year went by that did not find him on trial for some spectacular breaking of the law. But he always escaped. In one way or another he could build up an alibi. He had friends scattered through the length and the breadth of the mountains, all more than willing to swear to whatever Brennan wished. He had skillful lawyers who knew how to frame his cases for him. And so he went scot-free.

He looked his full age, now. An iron-gray man was he, close to fifty; without surplus flesh, active, wiry, and a little straighter and faster with a gun than ever before, men said.

Mr. Burgess paused and regarded the great man with a measure of awe and a measure of envy. There was hardly an achievement of Brennan's

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that Burgess would not gladly have made his own. He looked. He admired the trained, keen-eyed, quiet legionaries who watched the crowd, searched every face, and made sure that no danger approached their well-guarded master. What a glorious life, then, to keep such fellows as these consistently at one's beck and call!

Burgess, shaking his head, and with a sigh of envy, went out from the hotel to the open street. And he found Pedrillo where he expected to find him—in the saloon, at the farther end of the bar, where there was a space cleared for him, as usual, and where his narratives could be heard by the discerning.

Burgess went straight up to him.

"Oñate," said he, "there's complete hell to pay!"

"Alas, señor, do not say so," said the fat Mexican, his good-natured self-satisfaction entirely unruffled. "What can be wrong where there is so much good liquor!"

"Do you remember Miss Beatrice Larkin?"

"The señorita?" said Oñate, shrugging his thick shoulders with such violence that his entire body shook. "Ah, yes! And what of her? She had a cruel, bright eye! It went through one like the blade of a knife, grazing the heart! What of her, señor?"

"She's come here for your master!"

The Mexican gaped.

"Holy Virgin!" he breathed, and hastily swallowed a glass of tequila.

"It's the truth," said Burgess. "And you know, now, that McCoy is here in town? But I tell you that unless you work very fast, the girl will get Fernald away before he's had a chance to fight with McCoy. Now, greaser, if you love the money that I've promised you, start to work, and start pronto!"

Oñate clutched the edge of the bar. So doing, his eyes caught the large diamond of his new ring. It fascinated him, not like a jewel, but like a great watching eye. To Oñate it had become more than human, and he would have done almost anything in this world rather than lose possession of it.

"Stay for me here," he said at last. "I shall go get my little father and bring him here to talk with you. He must know you, señor, before he will do such a thing!"

So Burgess, with a rising hope in his heart, waited for the coming of the young killer; and when Fernald arrived, all three walked in the yard behind the saloon, a big stretch of ground, dotted with poplars.

There Burgess told his story of lies with all the conviction that he could summon. And there young Fernald listened with a grave air, shaking his head from time to time as he considered the villainy of which the prosecuted Burgess spoke.

"It is all as Pedrillo has told me!" said Robert at last. "A good man fallen into the hands of a villain! Mr. Burgess, if there is anything I can do that will help you, count on me. Let me know where to find this scoundrel, and I'll go to him at once!"

Burgess gripped Robert's hand and wrung it with a mighty pressure.

"He's in this town—in this hotel!" said Sim Burgess. "The devil that has brought him luck all his life has deserted him now. He's left the Big Bend and come up here. God bless you, Mr. Fernald, if you can help me!"

"Here?" asked Robert, his eyes gleaming with a light that robbed his face of its fresh boyishness. "Here at this hotel?"

And without another word, he turned on his heel and strode from the yard and into the building.

Burgess exchanged glances with Pedrillo, mopping his brow the while.

"It's done, señor," said Pedrillo, "and McCoy is a dead man this minute!"

So saying, he looked up at the hotel;

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and there he saw, staring down at him through a closed window, a face that made him gasp and turn gray-green.

"Señor! Look!" gasped Pedrillo.

"What is it?" asked Burgess, starting violently.

"It is Señor McCoy—at that window—no, he is gone from it now!"

Burgess stared up, fascinated.

"Why did you jump and carry on like that when you saw him?" snarled Burgess. "Will you tell me that? Now, if there's a suspicion in him, you've sure brought it to the top of the pool!"

"He couldn't hear what I said," said Pedrillo, still uneasy. "But I said that he must be dead now—and then looking up and seeing him—it was like seeing the evil eye—the face of a ghost—and I think that there's an end to my good luck!"

He stood still, staring blankly at the ground.

"There's an end to it," repeated Pedrillo. "And I shall be back in rags, in the very dirt and dust of the street!"

Burgess recovered his good spirits at once, as though the depression of his companion stimulated him to better thoughts.

"McCoy has an eye like the eye of a ferret," said he. "But he can't have heard a thing; and he can't have guessed what I'm up to——"

"Why not?" exclaimed the Mexican. "He knows that you want him dead. And he's sure to guess at something, seeing you here with me and with the little father! God forgive all my sins! God forgive them! I am going to offer at the shrine of——"

He found himself talking to the air, for Mr. Sim Burgess was walking off toward the rear entrance of the hotel with a carelessly confident swing to his gait, whistling as he went. For he had noted that evil gleam in the eyes of Fernald, and it promised to him the realization of all of his hopes, and at once.

Pedrillo got no comfort from this. He looked up again at the window where he had seen McCoy, and, though that window still was blank, it seemed to him that the grim eye of the rancher was fixed upon him from empty space. So, bowing his head, he skulked into the hotel in his turn.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GENTLEMAN AND THE TIGER.

WHAT did Robert Fernald do when he reached the hotel? He went as straight as a hound on the trail to the room of his quarry. He tapped on the door. There was no answer, except the muffled echo of the noise which he himself had made. There he paused a moment.

He was on fire with a double reason. On the one hand, he felt that he had committed himself to a good cause. On the other hand, he felt that he had to do with a practiced warrior of the range. And, for both reasons, he would not have had to do with a better affair. It was suited to his hand in every respect.

He wandered down into the lobby to make inquiries, but he did not have to search far.

"Where's Mr. McCoy?" he asked.

"Settin' right out on the veranda now, sir," said the proprietor, and he rubbed his fat hands together and smiled upon Robert.

There was such a rush of important guests on this present day, that the hotel keeper would have been affable to a greaser, even. How much more so, then, to as distinguished a character as Robert Fernald, battler extraordinary?

Out through the doorway stepped Robert.

Let us accompany him not only with an observing eye, but entering into his

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flesh and spirit. There had been a time, when he first issued from his college doors and came West to seek adventure, when he feared only lest he should reveal himself to himself as a natural coward. That time had ended. Even Robert himself knew that there was only one thing which gave spice to life, and that was danger. He still was blind to the moral danger of such an attitude, even though Beatrice Larkin had not so long ago pointed out the hard facts to him in harder words. However, here he was like a drunkard in the immediate presence of an ocean of liquor.

Yonder on the veranda sat a possible opponent, a dangerous fighter, a mature and crafty brain. Yonder was an evil man—he had the word of Pedrillo for it! And through the doorway, Robert stepped with a heart as light as the heart of a hawk when it sees game rising from the covert far beneath.

It was not that he was certain of victory. What he loved was the thrill of the encounter, the facing of death, and above all, the dreadful moment of pause which generally preceded the actual battle. Other men were unnerved by that instant. To Robert it was like wine, a thing to be tasted, and prolonged in the tasting!

Such was his spirit, then, as he stepped onto the veranda; and, as he came out, he saw his quarry at once, seated in a chair at the farther end of the porch, tilted back against the wall of the building, with a few idlers on either side of him.

McCoy was in the very act of counting out a thick little sheaf of bills into the hands of a gray-headed fellow beside him. And the latter, as he stuffed the money into his wallet, looked up to Robert, who was approaching with a step as light and gay as the beating of his own heart.

"Here we are," said the gray-headed man. "You've just made your dicker in time!"

Robert stood before the chair of McCoy.

"You're Mr. McCoy, I believe?" said he, in his gentle voice, but with his eyes as cold and bright as the eyes of a hunting bird.

"I'm McCoy," said the lean man.

"My name is Robert Fernald. May I have a few words apart with you, sir?"

"Words?" asked McCoy dryly. "D'you mean words, or bullets?"

Robert started, and flushed. He could hardly believe his ears.

"Is that what you mean?" said McCoy. "Well, lad, this ain't my day to be murdered!"

Robert gave back a little. It was a stunning surprise to him. For he had figured to himself a little stroll with McCoy down the street, and during that stroll he would suddenly confront the evil rancher and tell him in plain words his judgment of his companion. That done, of course guns would flash at once. There would be scores of witnesses to see that it was a fair fight —and then——

It was a simple plan. It should have worked. But here was an odd matter! It was as though McCoy had listened to the interview which had just taken place in the back yard of the hotel! But no matter what McCoy thought, he had been written down for Robert as a bold and courageous scoundrel, and pride should have made him rise to accept any challenge from a single opponent.

Instead, he leaned back in his chair and regarded Robert with perfect calm; and all the time his eyes were as the eyes of one who reads in a book. One who sits securely by the fire, and reads!

"Mr. McCoy," said Robert, "I think that you've said something which requires a little explaining."

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"Have I?" replied the rancher indifferently. "Well, you tell him, partner. You got the right to tell him, I guess!"

He gestured to the gray-headed man beside him.

"All right. I'll talk," said the latter, regarding Robert with a curious interest, not entirely hostile. "Kid, you don't know me?"

"I don't," said Robert, more and more bewildered, and his face growing hotter and hotter as his wits failed to keep pace with this odd situation.

"I'm Brennan."

"You're Brennan!" cried Robert, turning very pale.

"You know me, eh?"

"You're Tiger Brennan!" repeated Robert, whiter than before.

"That's me, kid."

"I'm glad to know you," said Robert, standing stiff and straight as a soldier.

He was beginning to tremble a little, too.

"And you have something to say to me—for Mr. McCoy?" he added.

"I have, youngster," said Brennan, who was beginning to smile. For he felt that he recognized these symptoms of fear. He had seen them many a time before like this. And the same smile appeared on the faces of the lean, grim young men who were seated upon either side of the criminal.

"I'm waiting, sir," said Robert Fernald, and suddenly he smiled in turn, a mere flash of expression rather than an actual smile, a glance of light, as it were; but it had a great effect upon Mr. Brennan, for suddenly he could see that what he had taken for fear was not fear at all, but really a tense, overmastering, soul-absorbing joy in danger.

It altered his own attitude at once.

"My lad," said Brennan, "you're here lookin' for trouble and wanting it real bad. But you ain't going to get the kind that you want. You want to make a show out of this here, and what would please you would be to have a stand-off fight with guns. But you ain't going to get the gun fight, kid. Not that way. There was a time," he added, "when I would've taken you on quick and finished you off, too. But my time is too dog-gone valuable and I got too many important things on my hands to waste myself scrapping now with every young fool that wants to get famous. Matter of fact, youngster, all that you'll get out of us is a killing. Here's me, and McCoy, and here's my three partners, all ready to turn loose at you. And if you so much as raise a finger, kid, we'll surely blow you to bits!"

He leaned forward a little as he said this, and Robert looked him full in the eye—then flashed a glance on either side.

McCoy remained at ease in his chair, smiling faintly with satisfaction. The three young men were leaning forward a little, tense and quivering, like eager hounds straining at the leash. There was not the slightest doubt that they would be at him the instant he made a dangerous move.

And then a terrible temptation took Robert by the throat. There were five of them, to be sure, and they were all fighting men celebrated for their skill with weapons. McCoy and Brennan were known; and these three young disciples of the latter were doubtless chosen because they were experts with weapons of all kinds. Yet suppose that he should whip out two guns and plant two bullets—that would finish one pair out of the five. Then fall for the floor, shooting as he fell; and, with a little luck—because certainly these men would not be expecting such a frontal assault against such odds—why, if he were to do such a deed as this, he would be raised at once to that dizzy pinnacle where the one and only Wild Bill now stood above the rest of

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the world. He would become an historic figure——

That wild temptation stung the heart of Robert; and who can tell what he would have done, had not the hard, cold voice of McCoy cut in on him:

"Don't do it, kid. You might get famous. But you'd get dead, too."

Robert straightened with a long, soft sigh.

"Brennan—and the rest of you," said he, "I'd like to know what is the meaning of all this!"

"I can tell you, sonny!" answered McCoy. "I've bought and paid for protection, and I've got it. You can go back to the dog that hired you and tell him that his medicine is no good. He's out of this here. He's tried to double cross me in every other possible way, and he's failed. Now he'll fail again. And he'll always fail. Because I've got his number, Fernald. He came high when he got you. But I came higher when I got Brennan. That's all! Now run along; you're late for school!"

And he chuckled a little, with a deep inner content.

Robert, quite baffled, went slowly away; and twice he paused to look back at the group on the veranda.

Instantly one of those tall, athletic youths who were with Brennan stood up.

"Where you gunna go, Charlie?" asked Brennan.

"Gunna take a lil' stroll," said the other.

He was a mighty man, slender about the waist, herculean around the shoulders and in the length and weight of his arms. And he stared earnestly in the direction of the hotel entrance through which Robert had just disappeared.

"Sit down, Dashwood!" said the master.

Dashwood hesitated, frowned, and then obeyed. But he was very restless, shifting back and forth in his chair as though he were terribly ill at ease.

"You want to take him by the throat, Charlie, don't you?" and Brennan grinned.

"And why not? The little runt!" muttered young Mr. Dashwood.

"It don't take a strong man to pull a gun," said Brennan wisely. "What good would all of your beef be against Fernald?"

"Have I got nothing but beef?" asked the youth quickly, and he turned his bold, bright eyes upon his master.

"You've got something else," admitted Brennan, "and you're gunna get still more, in time. But you ain't up to Fernald, just yet!"

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating," observed this sullen youth.

"Exactly. And though you've done a good deal of eating, kid, don't you get away with the idea that you can't be et in your turn. And that pink-cheeked kid is just the baby to turn the trick!"

"I don't see it," muttered Dashwood, growing a violent red.

"Look here, Charlie, you're a brave kid. But would you tackle five men like the bunch of us here?"

"Well, no," said Dashwood. "I ain't that much of a flathead, I hope!"

"Of course you ain't. Well, lemme give you an idea about Fernald and the kind of a gent that he is. When he was standin' here, he wanted terrible bad to get at you and the rest of us. When I talked big over him, he come within an ace of letting drive at the bunch of us!"

"Him?" grunted Dashwood. "He was scared white!"

"He was white with wanting to tear us to pieces. That was all. Don't make no mistake, Charlie. You can't read men, yet. You need more training! Ask McCoy if the kid wasn't on edge to jump the whole gang of us?"

"I was never closer to dying," said McCoy calmly and judicially. "I knew

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that he would get you, Brennan, and me, with his first pair of shots. Maybe your boys would shoot him to bits afterwards, but the pair of us would've gone down first. That was why I spoke. I wanted to break the spell. And when he paused a bit, walkin' away from us, why, he was sayin' to himself: 'Ain't there a chance? If I was to turn back, ain't there a chance that I could kill the whole bunch of them by fast shooting?' That was the way that he was working things out in his head. And maybe he could. Anyway, it threw a chill into me."

Charlie Dashwood lost all of his restlessness and settled back in his chair; he even shuddered a little, as a man will do when he has had a narrow escape.

And Brennan said at last: "I've seen 'em big and I've seen 'em small. I've seen 'em that fought for money, and I've seen 'em that fought for fame; but I've never seen one before that loved guns for the sake of the death that was inside of them! McCoy, I took on this here job too cheap!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROGUE AND THE RING.

THERE was more than one reason why Robert should feel as though one half of the world had crashed about his ears. In the first place, he felt that he had been shamed, even though by numbers a little too great to be faced with good sense. But, in the second place, he was bewildered because he did not see how true Westerners could have acted as these fellows had done. For he had made a fair proffer of battle, and they had driven him away by the pressure of vastly superior numbers. It was quite beyond his understanding, for he could not help feeling that these were no cowards but truly brave men!

If Robert's vanity had been developed a little more, he might have hit upon the correct explanation, but, as it was, he missed it entirely, and went to find Mr. Sim Burgess.

He found that worthy in closest consultation with Pedrillo Oñate, and the pair of them raised brows furrowed with hope and trouble.

"Something's gone wrong," Robert heard Burgess say to the Mexican. "Something's gone wrong, and if he's missed at the first try, he's missed altogether!"

To them, Robert explained briefly what had happened: how he had confronted McCoy and found that that hero had bought the protection of no less a man than Brennan and all his coterie of promising young gun fighters. What, then, was to be done?

Robert suggested that he leave town with Pedrillo, and then when McCoy departed in turn, Mr. Burgess could announce the event with a smoke signal.

"Stay here in town with all of them devils?" gasped Burgess. "I'd be dead in one hour after you left, of course!"

That settled this suggestion. They talked a little longer and then retired to Robert's room to carry on their consultation. Here, as they entered, Pedrillo adroitly scooped up a letter that had been passed under the door. And when he and Burgess left the room a few minutes later, the latter was quick to ask why the missive had been purloined.

"There was no stamp on that letter," said Pedrillo. "And who would be writing a letter to the little father in this town? It's the señorita, to get him back to Larkin Valley!"

"I understand," grinned Burgess, "and once you get back with him to Larkin Valley, you stop being a big gun. You're just an ordinary sort of piker. Ain't that it? You can't stand around in the saloons, then, and blow about the things that your boss has

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done and the things that he pretty near done. And, worst of all, you wouldn't be getting any little commissions, like this here one from me!"

And he cast a sour glance at the diamond which sparkled on the little finger of Oñate.

"Ah, señor," said Pedrillo, "have no fear whatever. We have been checked, but we have not been beaten. It will not be as quick as I expected; but we'll manage to win. The little father never stops until he has reached his man, and when he reaches his man, the man dies. It is always true."

So saying, he ripped the envelope open with his teeth and took out the inclosed letter. He read aloud:

My Dear Fernald: From what I've heard of you, you don't pick on honest men. And that is what I claim to be. What sort of lies have been told to you by Burgess I don't know, but I can imagine. I've even heard that money can't corrupt you, and if that's the case, you've been hoodwinked by some clever, lying story.

Now, Fernald, I want to tell you the true story of what happened in my partnership with Burgess. As for the proofs, it's commonly known all through the Big Bend, where his credit isn't big enough to gain the attention of even the greasers.

These are the facts. I had an old mortgage on a stretch of land that had belonged to——

Here Burgess snatched the letter away.

"Señor?" asked the startled Pedrillo.

"That's enough of that!" scowled Burgess. "Leave the letter be. It's all nothin' but lies!"

"Lies that the whole of the Big Bend would swear to, señor?" asked the Mexican; and then he chuckled softly, a chuckle rich in understanding. "I ask no questions, amigo," said he. "What you say is enough for—a friend!"

"Greaser," said Burgess sourly, "you talk too much. Leave off, will you?" He added: "Now, I'm gunna tell you something, Oñate. Unless McCoy is a dead man inside of two days, I get back everything that I've given to you. You understand?"

Oñate, turning a little green, moved the diamond ring so that the jewel was securely hidden inside the fat palm of his hand.

"You are very hard, amigo," said he gently. "But I shall do what I can."

So they parted, and Mr. Burgess, going gloomily up the main street a little later, came squarely into McCoy as the latter rounded a corner. McCoy, but not alone. On either side of him marched as a guard of honor one of Brennan's chosen men of war.

They halted before Burgess, who shrank back into a doorway, clutching the jamb, ready to leap into the interior at the first sign of trouble.

McCoy, however, merely smiled.

"You've missed again, Sim," said he. "and you'll always miss. The reason is, old-timer, that you don't think straight enough to be honest, and you don't think well enough to make a successful crook."

Charles Dashwood was one of the guards, and now he said thoughtfully: "It looks to me, McCoy, as if you had a pretty good case ag'in this rat. Why don't you let me polish him off for you?"

Burgess shrank deeper into the doorway, his eyes glittering with terror; but tall McCoy merely answered: "I couldn't do it. The fact is, Charlie, that I don't go in even for the killing of vermin—and besides, this here gent was a partner of mine, once, and I liked him well enough to trust him!"

"It's your business, not mine," replied Dashwood. "Leave him be, then. And maybe he's got enough poison inside of him to finish him off, one of these here days. Only Burgess, keep clean clear of me. And keep clear of the rest of us. We don't like your looks, and they's a price on the scalps of coy-

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otes, down in my part of the country! I might make a little mistake!"

He grinned at Burgess most evilly, and then the trio marched on down the street, without so much as a single backward glance at Burgess. For his part, he had enough of a shock to send him skulking into a back room of the saloon, and there he sat down to whisky—whisky straight, red, and raw—and drank until the fear was burned out of his brain and a red-stained mist filled its place.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THE HERO THOUGHT OF HIS VALET.

NOW when Robert Fernald got back to his room, he fell into a quandary which lasted him all the rest of that day and kept him awake most of the night. He had only one visitor during this time, and the visitor was Dan Parker, who strode into the room and sat down on the end of the table.

He found Robert pacing restlessly back and forth, an extremely nervous young man, sometimes fidgeting at the window which looked onto the street, and again hurrying up and down the room as though in search of something he had lost.

"Bob, old fellow," said the ranch foreman, "tell me the straight of it. Are you coming back with us now?"

"Coming back?" snapped Robert, grown irritable.

"That's what I said."

"How can I come back, Dan? I've given my word to——"

"To kill McCoy?"

Robert gaped.

"The whole town knows about it," explained Parker.

"How?"

"You can't walk up to five men and ask for trouble without having the news spread around, Bob. But what makes the rest of us wonder is this: How'd you ever get mixed up in any job on the side of a gent like Burgess?"

"And what's wrong with him?"

"Why, he's a bad egg, that's all."

"You're generally right," said Robert, "but the fact is that you're completely out in this case, Dan. McCoy is a villain. And Burgess is the man he's wronged."

"Who told you that?"

"I had it from Burgess himself!"

Parker bit his lip. He wanted to scoff at this testimony, but he knew something about the childlike simplicity of Robert Fernald, and therefore he held his tongue.

"Had it from anybody else?" he asked.

"Yes, from Pedrillo."

"Oñate!" burst out Parker. "I knew he was at the bottom of the whole idiotic business!"

"Ah?" breathed Robert, and raised his head, a cold light in his eyes.

Dan Parker scowled at him.

"I know what you mean," said he. "You want to pick a fight even with me, Bob. But you can't. Because I'm not fighting you, you see. Suicide ain't my line. I get excitement other ways. But Oñate—the fat pig—the fat snake, I ought to call him! Why, Bob, you're letting him lead you around by the nose for his own profit!"

"Profit, Dan? Pedrillo's profit?"

"Who else?"

"I don't understand?"

"How did you find Oñate," said Parker, beginning to tap out his points against the palm of his hand.

"In San Joaquin."

"Where?"

"In the street."

"Wearing silks and lots of gold lace?"

"No, he was a ragged beggar, of course."

"Is he a ragged beggar now?"

"Not at all. He has a good deal of luck at cards, you see, and he makes

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money in that way. He really looks quite splendid now, don't you think?"

"Why didn't he make money at cards before he hooked up with you?"

"How can I answer that? His luck was out, I suppose. That's all."

"Bob, lemme tell you something."

"What?"

"You're his luck."

"I?"

"I mean you're his card game."

"I don't follow you, Dan."

"Well, make a hard try to, because I've got the straight of this."

"You have?"

"Pedrillo is simply making a gold mine out of you."

"Ah, there in the very beginning you're all wrong! As a matter of fact, it's a wonderful thing that although Pedrillo has worked for me all this time, I simply can't make him take money!"

"Bob, you make me want to curse! As a matter of fact, the brown-faced swine is simply taking a commission for every job that he gets you to do!"

"Job?"

"Who worked you into this case of Burgess against McCoy? It was Oñate. And look back and you'll find that he's led you into the other fights that you've been having. Somebody profits out of those fights. Who? Why, Oñate, of course! His commission is what makes him a rich greaser right now!"

Robert merely shook his head, and he smiled upon Parker with a calm superiority.

"You're like most people, Dan," said he. "You can't see that, as a matter of fact, there are some folks who do good for the sake of good, where there are others who have to be paid for it."

"And Oñate is one of the first kind, is he?" asked the foreman, his lips curling in angry disbelief.

"Let me tell you something about him. He and I have to take some hard trips. Well, Dan, on those trips through the mountains or across the desert, Oñate is like a personal servant to me. He does the cooking, and never complains, no matter how long the trail that we've ridden over since dawn. He keeps up a cheerful front in all weathers. He'll even groom my horse for me, if I'll let him. In every respect he looks after me!"

"Go on," said Parker, more gloomy than ever. "I see what you're driving at, though."

"And in reward for these services, I've tried to make him take something in the way of regular wages from me. But he won't do it. I've even slipped money into his pocket. But the next morning I'm sure to find that he's slipped it back in mine."

Tears came into the eyes of Robert. He fairly trembled as he contemplated the goodness of the Mexican.

"And between us, Dan," said he, "there's a real attachment. I assure you that it's real on my side, and I know that it is on the side of Pedrillo!"

"Bob," snapped the foreman, "gimme a chance, and I'll knock that idea of yours into a cocked hat! I'll show you as a fact that Pedrillo is only a hound and a loafer, playing you for an easy mark who——"

Robert shook his head with finality.

"I don't want to have my faith in him broken," said he. "In the first place, I know that it can't be. In the second place, I don't like to have you try. Pedrillo is all right. You can't fool me about him, Dan, no matter what wrong impression you may have on the subject!"

Fernald said this with such emotion that Parker pursued the subject no further but left the room and went to a certain earnest and resolute young lady who was waiting to get a report.

Seeds of suspicion had been planted in the mind of Robert Fernald, however. He might deny that they had

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touched fertile soil. And, if they sprouted, he might hoe them up resolutely. Yet, nevertheless, the mind is in its own place—as more than one profound observer has noted—and our control over it can never be more than a mild tyranny. It is apt to rise and assert itself with rebellious strength at any moment.

So the sway of Pedrillo Oñate was seriously threatened, though the danger might not come to a head for a long time. And Robert was left alone with increasingly serious thoughts, pacing back and forth in his room, and finally throwing himself face downward on his bed.

He had reached such a state of utter depression that he began to be acutely aware of all the small things in life around him. The sounds in the street; the smell of cookery from some nearby kitchen that blew faintly through his window; and then the pattern of the bedspread! Mixed with all these sense impressions was an overwhelming gloom that invaded his mind with an irresistible force, for he could see more and more clearly that what he had wanted to be he had failed in attaining. He had wished to go through the world like a perfect knight errant, redressing wrongs. He had failed! For now men were beginning to look upon him as a hired bully! It was very unjust, but it was true. He could not avoid the realization that this judgment was so very widespread that now he was looked upon askance, and he sank under the burden of that thought. He suddenly fell into a troubled sleep!

When he wakened, the room was dim with shadows. He found that a blanket had been laid over him carefully, and the unmistakable fragrance of a Mexican cigarette filled the air. He raised his head. Pedrillo sat in the corner near the window. The cigarette was marked by a tiny glowing spot of red; the face of Oñate was lost in shadow.

Emotion rushed through the heart of Robert.

"Pedrillo!" he said.

"Señor?"

Pedrillo came swiftly to him, the room shaking a little with his heavy step.

"Pedrillo, a thought occurs to me."

"Yes, little father."

"Now and again, I'm short-tempered, peevish, and use bad words to you. Promise me to understand that my heart never changes. My trust in you is absolute, Pedrillo!"

"Señor, how could I doubt it? We have traveled too many trails together!"

"Give me your hand, Pedrillo!"

They shook hands, and Robert sighed. Sleep had smoothed much of the pain and the trouble from his mind; and now he felt that all was well. Let the rest of the world misunderstand as much as it pleased, but between him and Pedrillo there was a perfect harmony. And what could a man expect more than one understanding spirit?

CHAPTER X.

DO LIONS EAT LADIES?

THE sun was not up when trouble returned to Robert Fernald; the gray light filled his room when he was wakened next morning, and again it was by the entrance of big Dan Parker who was in a fury, cursing at every step he took.

"What's wrong?" asked Robert.

"Wrong? Everything's wrong! Miss Beatrice and her aunt are gone—spirited away—flown—and no trace of them left behind!"

Robert sat up in bed and stared.

"It doesn't seem possible!" said he.

"Don't tell me what seems possible or don't; I tell you what's happened. They told me to wake them just be-

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fore daylight so's they could get a flying start this morning on the trail back to the ranch. I went and rapped at their door. No answer. I banged loud—no answer. I pushed the door open. By Heaven, the lock of it was broken—it had been forced! There I found everything in disorder. And no sign of the pair of them. I ran downstairs to the stable. And there I found that their horses were gone. The stable boy was drunk, didn't know a thing. And, Fernald, your man Pedrillo probably has had a hand in some dirty plot—and maybe you have, too!"

He raged out these words in a shapeless jumble, so that Robert barely could make out his meaning. But when he did understand, he swung to the floor and stood up. He began to dress with frantic haste.

"Dan, they've simply started on ahead of you for the ranch trail——"

"Started on alone? Without me? Without even a word to me? No, I tell you, there's been crooked work!"

"How could it have happened?" asked Robert, fighting to disbelieve the worst possibilities. Something would have been heard."

"In the middle of that windstorm last night?"

Robert had slept through the storm. Now he merely blinked.

"Besides," said Parker, "a touch of chloroform would have made the women quiet enough!"

"Chloroform?" cried Robert. "Man, man, what is it that you think has happened?"

"Is it the first time that women have been kidnaped in this country?" asked Parker, raging more than ever. "Put your wits together and make it all out for yourself!"

Robert could make out nothing. His mind had been reduced to a blank even by the terrible possibility. Now he was finishing his dressing.

Pedrillo, who slept on a cot at the other side of the room, was likewise dressed, accomplishing his work with wonderful agility, considering his single hand.

Parker turned savagely upon the Mexican.

"He's behind it, Bob," he cried. "You'll find out that the greaser had his hand in the thing!"

"You talk like a madman, Dan!" exclaimed Robert.

"Señor Parker," shouted Pedrillo. writhing with emotion, "I swear—I vow—I give my honor!"

"Your honor!" sneered the big foreman. "You ain't got none!"

"There's nothing gained by abusing Pedrillo," broke in Robert. "But what under heaven can we do? Have you raised the town? Have you sent for the sheriff——"

"What good will that do? We need to start and ride!" said Dan Parker. "Will you come with me, Fernald?"

"Alas, señor," said Pedrillo in haste, "you have given your word to——"

"To what?" broke in Dan Parker. "To kill McCoy? Is that what you mean, Oñate? Bob, that is proof of what I told you. The scoundrel is urging you on into an——"

"I've given my word," said Robert earnestly, "but I'll redeem it later without fail. What's the life of McCoy compared to the happiness of Beatrice Larkin? God forgive me if I hesitate! Dan, let's get to our horses—Pedrillo, raise the town—call out every one!"

Pedrillo, with a deep groan, and rolling his eyes like a man turned suddenly faint, went from the room, while Parker said: "We'll take a last look in their room—there may be some sort of clew——"

Into the deserted room of the two women they stormed, and almost at once Robert saw the thing that, in their hearts, they half expected. It was pinned against the rough wall with a

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splinter, a piece of paper that fluttered in the wind of their coming. Robert caught it from its place and found that it was covered with a roughly made writing consisting of separate, straight strokes of a pencil, so that it looked at first rather like a series of meaningless scratches than a legible message. However, as soon as one's eyes grew accustomed to the system of the markings, it was possible to make out the words:

Bring ten thousand to the foot of Crystal Mountain a week from to-day. They won't be harmed.

"Kidnaping!" breathed Robert, growing very sick.

He even had to steady himself by resting a hand against the broad shoulder of Dan Parker, who had snatched the paper from the limp fingers of Robert and was busy reading it in turn.

"I knew it!" groaned Parker. "I guessed it with the first look. Lord, what'll we do?"

"Start now for our horses—and then ride with the devil behind us!" said Robert through his teeth, resuming his energy with a sudden start. "Are you ready, Dan?"

"Ready, lad. Yes, yes!"

Shoulder to shoulder they rushed down the stairs.

"Who could have done it, Dan?"

"Brennan? Why not Brennan? Isn't he the man for such a job as this? Would any one else have dared?"

"No one else would have dared!" shouted Parker suddenly. "Here's Brennan's room. Try him here——"

They beat at the door. It was locked, and silence answered them. Parker did not hesitate. One thrust of his powerful shoulder cast the door wide, and he lurched into the chamber. A glance was all they needed. The room was quite empty of any man or even blanket-roll; and the bed had not been slept in.

"God help us! God help us!" gasped Robert. "Hurry, Dan!"

The house was rising, now. Men were stumbling out of their rooms, most of them with naked guns in their hands, for in the distance there was the dreadful voice of Oñate, howling like a wolf. The proprietor, half mad with dismay, met them at the stables. They told him the story in half a dozen words. And then they flung the saddles on their horses. Others had heard the tale by this time, from the throat of Pedrillo Oñate, and swarms of men rose up around them, saddling horses, and making ready with much noise to take up the trail.

What trail? And where could it lead? Toward Crystal Mountain?

In five minutes groups of restless riders were sweeping this way and that around the village, cutting for sign in frantic haste, and finding nothing except several minor clews of their own leaving.

But this much was known. With the two women, Brennan and his three companions had disappeared; and it did not need much forethought to connect the disappearance of the one with the disappearance of the other.

Robert and Parker, riding together, kept away from the other searchers until the snorting mule of Pedrillo brought that matchless trailer up with them. He had saddled as fast as he could to follow them, not because he wanted to be in on the work, but, no doubt, because he dreaded to be left behind in the village where McCoy could get at him—to say nothing of Sim Burgess, who would be wanting certain sums in cash and a jewel of value refunded.

So Oñate joined them; and, being with them, he could hardly help but use his rare talents. Put pencil and paper before an artist and a drawing must result. So it was with Pedrillo on the trail. He could not help but

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hunt, and it seemed that he could hardly help but find.

The wind of the night apparently had wiped out all traces, but on a stretch of firm ground beyond a draw, Pedrillo found what he wanted—the prints of the hoofs of six horses.

"We have a long hunt before us," said Pedrillo. "They left when it was still quite dark, and they were riding hard."

"How do you tell that, Pedrillo?"

"You see the distance that the horses were striding? That shows the speed of their gallop. And notice how close two of them came to that tree. They must have had to duck the branches. If it had been daylight, they would have swung wide.

"I'll call in a dozen of the best men," went on Pedrillo. "We'll need all their help if——"

"Wait for nothing," urged Dan Parker with much resolution. "Twelve men can't keep pace with six. And I saw Brennan's horses. He's mounted for a race!"

"You-two against four?" cried Pedrillo, gaping.

"Are you willing?" Parker turned to Robert.

"Ready and willing," said Fernald. "Go on, Pedrillo! Hunt down this trail as you never hunted before!"

And he spoke to his pinto, and that hardy and beautiful little horse swung into a reaching gallop that consumed the ground as easily as the canter of a greyhound. They headed straight across the desert. The town dropped out of sight behind them. In silence they rode. The heat began to drop heavily from the heavens and wash back to them from the glowing surface of the sands. The surface grew yielding. They had to slow to a walk, and there is nothing so disheartening as a chase continued at a walk! The sand slushed softly around the feet of the horses; the stirrup leathers creaked; the horses puffed and snorted the blowsand from their nostrils; they were proceeding rather like a plow team than a fleet-footed posse.

Then the Mexican said: "Listen to me, señors. You say that Señor Brennan has done this thing for ten thousand dollars. It is not possible!"

"Tell us why, Pedrillo."

"Señor Brennan has many men working for him. He cannot afford to waste his time on small game. And ten thousand is not much to him. Besides, this is not the sort of thing that he does. Here he has shown his hand openly. Every one in the world would know that he has done this thing. It is not possible. He is as secret as a fox."

"The whole world knows that he has done this thing," said Dan Parker, scoffingly, "and yet you say that he has not done it?"

"I talk against myself. That is because I am trying to think honestly," said Pedrillo. "But does such a man as Señor Brennan take a chance at prison for two or three thousand dollars? No, little father, that cannot be!"

"A lion will eat a mouse, Pedrillo," said Robert Fernald.

"You have the facts in front of you, Pedrillo," commented Dan Parker. "How will you dodge them?"

"He seems to have stolen the two ladies," said Pedrillo, "and yet he cannot have done it. He has stolen them and yet he has not stolen them. And if this seems like madness, wait a little while, and you will see!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROVERBIAL PEDRILLO.

A DAY passed, and another. They were days of scorching heat, endless labor. Again and again the trail was blotted out before their eyes. Nothing but the incredible skill of the

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Mexican was able to recover it, so it seemed.

Dan Parker was both cheerful and resolute. Robert Fernald was as a man devoured by a terrible fear. His face grew drawn. He stared constantly at the wavering heat lines along the horizon. But both Parker and Fernald were comparatively silent whereas the tongue of Pedrillo Oñate rarely ceased wagging.

"I am the eyes," said Pedrillo, "and I see the way into danger, and yet I cannot help going into the cave. There we shall be torn to pieces. What are two men against four? Four such men! I saw them. Like four mountain lions. You are no more than mountain sheep. You will be cut to pieces. Afterward, they will strip me and turn me out to starve or let the desert sun burn me to a cinder!"

"You never could starve," said big Parker. "You've got enough fat between your skin and your bones to keep you going like a camel for a month! Besides, Pedrillo, your skin is so wonderfully thick that the sun never could burn through it. So have no fear!"

"Ah, fear eats me," said Pedrillo, smiting his hand against his stomach with force. "Fear eats me like a wolf! I lie in the shadow of this danger."

"Listen!" said Parker. "He's dealing in proverbs, now, but I know a few to match them. Pedrillo, all the weapons of war cannot arm fear."

"I do not wish to be armed. I wish to go home!" said Oñate. "Fear has big eyes, and sees the truth."

"On the contrary, fear has no understanding."

"Fear is one part of prudence, señor. Fear guards the vineyard."

"He that fears not the future may enjoy the present," said Parker.

"Ah, señor," replied the Mexican, rallying himself to this duel of memory, "he that fears danger in time seldom feels it."

"I have lived too long near a wood to be frightened by owls," said the foreman.

"Wise fear beats care," answered the Mexican. "Fear makes lions tame, says the proverb. And who, señor, would not prefer a tame lion to a wild one?"

"Listen to him!" laughed Parker. "He has made out a case to prove that a coward is wiser and better than a brave man. But I'll try him on another subject. You are always talking, Pedrillo, and yet silence is golden."

"The silent dog is the first to bite," answered Pedrillo.

"Silence brings friendship," said Parker; "it is a fine jewel though it is seldom worn; it is more eloquent than words; it is the answer to anger; it is wisdom; it never betrays you; and it reaps what speech sows."

"To all of this," replied Pedrillo, grinning, "I will make only one reply: *Silence is the virtue of a fool!*"

This stinging proverb, so aptly applied, brought an oath from Parker; but Pedrillo was greatly contented, and rolled from side to side in his saddle, chuckling and nodding.

"You will never beat him at that game," said Robert, smiling at the red face of Parker.

"He is fuller of proverbs than a porcupine is of quills," admitted the foreman. "But I think that all proverbs were invented by lawyers; they talk on both sides of the case. Let's stop here a minute in the shade of this rock. My horse is fagged. Have you a proverb on stopping, Pedrillo?"

"The best time to stop is the beginning," said Pedrillo.

"Confound him, he has always something to say. What's your meaning this time, greaser?"

"That we never should have begun this trail!"

"Now, Pedrillo," said Robert, "tell me honestly that you have missed the

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trail and that for the last three hours you have been riding blindly. Certainly I haven't seen a sign or a ghost of a sign. Have you, Dan?"

"Not a trace. Confess, Pedrillo!"

"I am aiming," said Pedrillo, "at those two gullies that open in the hills, yonder."

"Aiming at both of them?"

"Yes, because in one of them we'll pick up the trail again."

"Are you sure?"

"Alas, señor, I am more than sure. For I know that the men we are following do not want us to miss the trail!"

"What the devil are you talking about?" exclaimed Parker. "This is rank nonsense, Pedrillo!"

"Señor, it is true nevertheless."

"Tell us what makes you think so."

"Because these people we are following know how to make a trail problem, but the ones that they have left for us are so simple that a child could solve them."

"Are we children, Fernald and I?" asked the big foreman, frowning again.

"No, no, señor. Not in all things."

Pedrillo grinned again. He was as fond as a woman of making his point.

"One can never corner the scoundrel," admitted the big man. "But go on, Pedrillo. You haven't explained enough."

"It is this way, señor. They do just enough to make most people think that they are trying to cover their trail. But I know that they could be cleverer if they wished."

"Well, Pedrillo, for three hours, as you admit, we've had not a ghost of a trail to follow. Explain that."

"Easily. Their trail this morning pointed for those same valleys in the foothills. They knew that if we lost the sign, we would cast ahead toward the hills."

"We'll see," murmured Parker. "I think this is nonsense."

"Nonsense, perhaps," said Fernald, as they resumed their journey, "but I'll tell you, Dan, that the Mexican is seldom wrong when he makes up his mind in earnest!"

"Do you think so?"

"I've seen him at work too many times!"

"Perhaps so. Well, I still have the privilege of doubting. We'll get a better idea when we come into those gullies."

They came into the first of the passes between the hills in the late afternoon. There was no trace of the six horses; but the Mexican did not delay for a long search. It would be the other valley up which the six had gone. "And depend upon it, my friends, that we shall find the sign immediately we enter."

As he suggested, so it happened. They found the complete trail written at large in the crossing of a clay bank. Parker and Fernald stared at one another.

"But," said Parker, "of course they had to get up this gulch and they couldn't avoid this bank!"

"Yes," nodded the Mexican. "There is that loose sand on the other side which would hold a trail no better than water."

"Their horses were too tired to ride them through loose sand."

"Señor, a frightened man is never too tired to make himself safe!"

"Tell me, Pedrillo," said Robert in some heat, "what makes you think this? And what could be in the head of Señor Brennan?"

"It is very simple. A child could understand," said the Mexican. "He is drawing us after him into the heart of the mountains, and there he will suddenly draw us into a trap. Look up yonder. Somewhere behind the cactus, one of his men is lying now with a glass trained on us, studying everything that we do."

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Fernald and Parker looked up instinctively.

"That is an old trail," said Parker with decision. "They're still a great distance ahead of us."

"That trail, señor, was made no longer ago than noon."

"What is your reason for that?"

"This is a moist clay bank; the hoof-prints are dry in the center, but still moist in the hollows on each side. If the horses had passed this way yesterday, the whole print would be dry now; if they had passed only within an hour, the whole print would be dark and moist."

Parker looked at Robert and nodded. He was much impressed.

"I've wondered how you could follow such long trails in the past," said he. "But now it's explained. You carry a hunting hound with you. I think that he's right, and Brennan may be holding a trap for us. We'll have to watch every wrinkle on the face of the hills as we go—we'll have to ride rifle in hand, old fellow!"

Robert shook his head.

"We have Oñate still with us," said he. "And one can trust to him. He can scent danger as far as a wild horse. And if there's the least danger ahead of us, you can depend on him to smell it out!"

"Very well," said Parker. "But now comes the crux. I think we'll be dead men—or famous—inside of the next twenty-four hours, Bob. What do you say?"

Fernald said nothing. He had grown pale, his lips were a trifle compressed, and he looked forward up the valley with a peculiar eagerness. Dan Parker studied him with interest that was seasoned by a peculiar fear. For what would have been panic in another man, in Robert Fernald was the sudden and fierce working of the desire to kill. Parker watched, therefore, with a species of awe and wonder. But they did not speak to one another for some time. Though the day was wearing late and the sun was low in the west, it shone down the length of that shallow valley and turned it into a meager trough of fire which turned the sweat on the horses to white salt, and seared the very eyelids of the riders.

The Mexican, in the meantime, rode his horse nervously, in an irregular line which waved back and forth from side to side of the ravine as he went from one vantage point to another.

"Look!" said Parker, "the impertinent scoundrels have brought their captives almost straight back to Larkin Valley!"

He had hardly finished speaking when Oñate came flying back to them, bowed over his saddle horn to make the better speed.

"Turn back, friends!" he gasped at them, as he went flying past with gray, pulpy face. "They are all there on the farther side of the hill!"

CHAPTER XII.

A TRAP?

"COME back!" called Fernald harshly.

The Mexican spurred his weary horse only the more vigorously.

"Come back, Oñate, or I'll shoot you out of the saddle!"

And Robert actually whipped his long rifle out of the scabbard which ran down the side of his saddle beneath his right knee.

"Good heavens, man, will you kill even Pedrillo?" exclaimed Dan Parker.

But Pedrillo was taking no chances with death. He glanced over his shoulder at the danger from the rear and instantly reined up and came back to them slowly, shaking his head in violent protest.

"They are all there on the farther side of the hill. They are all there, señor! Four devils, at least, and maybe more."

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"The ladies, Pedrillo. Did you see the two ladies, also?"

"I saw the bait they are using for their trap," said Pedrillo. "But they are not women! They are not women, I swear to you!"

"He's gone out of his head," said Parker sternly. "Bob, let's, you and I, press ahead and pay no more attention to this gibbering idiot!"

"Ah, ah, ah!" gasped Pedrillo. "Then you are in the plot also, Señor Parker! You are working for Brennan! You are in the plot also!"

"You yellow-faced devil!" snarled big Parker and reached for the fat throat of Oñate; and found it, sinking the fingers deep in the rolling fat, until Oñate's tongue thrust out, and his eyes rolled up to heaven.

"Don't hurt him," said Fernald, without heat but in the manner of one who must be obeyed instantly.

Parker obediently released the greaser.

"He needs to be flayed alive, Bob," he commented. "Did you hear? He said that I was—by Heaven, I *shall* beat him to a pulp!"

He made another pass, but Pedrillo sought refuge behind his master. All the while, his tongue was busy.

"Beware, señor. Beware, dear little father!"

"Be still, Pedrillo," said Robert Fernald impatiently. "Parker is one of my oldest and best friends!"

"Better an open enemy than a false friend!" said Oñate. "And avoid a friend who covers you with his wings and destroys you with his beak!"

"By Heaven, I'll kill the dirty dog!" said Parker, reaching for a gun, his face very black.

"Hold on, Dan, old fellow. Just let him talk it out. He can't do you any harm with me, of course! Go on, Pedrillo, and get this nonsense out of your system!"

"Look! Look!" said Pedrillo, still keeping his sheltered place behind Robert, and pointing his fat, quivering arm at Parker from the barricade. "Look at him! He's changing his color! There is treachery in his heart."

In fact, Parker was a little pale, though he had been terribly red before.

Fernald merely laughed.

"Pedrillo, you are worse than an old woman!" said he. "You try to make every speck in the sky into an eagle!"

"Look, señor, he is shaken. I only guessed before, but now I know. He is working in some manner with that murderer, that cutthroat, that devil of a man-eater, Brennan, *El Tigre!*"

Robert laughed, and waited for more, nodding and smiling at Parker, who seemed to take these remarks from the Mexican with a singular bad grace.

"First," said the Mexican, "Parker rushes away with you on this terrible trail. He never argued when you wanted to get more men to take the trail. He was eager to ride on it—just the two of you—he and you!"

"Because he is a brave man," said Robert, smiling again at the tall foreman.

Pedrillo was becoming immensely disturbed.

"Think only a little moment!" he warned. "Is Señor Parker a fool?"

"Of course not. Does it follow that he's a villain, Pedrillo?"

"He is not a fool, you admit. Then he knows that he is not a great fighting man. Does he not? He is no Robert Fernald; he is no Brennan; and he is not even so good a fighter as any of those wild young men who live with Brennan. Is not that true?"

"Are you going to listen to any more of this sort of stuff?" asked Parker, raging with impatient anger.

"Let him talk himself out," replied Fernald. "I've learned before that words won't stay bottled up in him,

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and the easiest way is to let him turn the bottle upside down at once, even if it takes quite a time. For sooner or later I'll have to listen to every one of these words!"

"Not if he was gagged with a rope!" said Parker savagely.

"Listen! He is afraid! He would like to kill me!" said the Mexican. "He would like to hang me up. He would like to drive bullets through my heart. Because he fears lest I should make you believe in the truth! That is the way with him!"

So said Pedrillo, bellowing with surety. He was hot with conviction.

"Consider, señor," he went on, "that this same man, who is not a fool, was willing to ride off with you and a one-armed Mexican who cannot use weapons on the trail of the terrible Brennan. He did not ask any questions. He did not wonder what would happen when he met Brennan. He only said that he wanted to rush ahead to the fight. Tell me, then, if he is not a fool, why does he wish to throw his life away so soon?"

"Ah, Pedrillo," said Robert sadly, "you never could understand such a man as my friend Dan Parker. You cannot understand how a man could lay down his life for a friend. You cannot understand, therefore, why Dan Parker would risk his life on this trail to catch Brennan and his gang of devils!"

"I? I understand everything!" shouted Pedrillo, infuriated at this aspersion upon his faith and his stoutness of heart. "I'll die ten times a day for my little father. But he—he's a paid man! He's a hired hand on a ranch. And you tell me that he is going to commit suicide for the sake of the señorita who employs him? Bah, he is only a——"

The hard fist of Dan Parker shot straight for the chin of the Mexican, who dodged behind Robert Fernald, and the driving arm of Parker staggered the smaller man.

Fernald frowned a little, but then shrugged his shoulders.

"Let Pedrillo alone," said he. "And you, Oñate, don't be such a madman. You say that you have just seen the whole party of Brennan, and the two ladies among them—and yet they are not women after all! Is that sense, my friend?"

"I saw them ride. I saw the way that they sat the saddle! I know that they are men, señor!"

Fernald considered Pedrillo more seriously.

"He actually has seen something," reflected Fernald. "He has some sort of reason working in him, Dan."

"The scoundrel is frightened to death," said Dan Parker. "But I don't care what he's thinking, because my job is to close in on Brennan and his crew the minute we can come up with them. I'm going to ride over the brow of that hill; and if Brennan and his gang are below, I'm going to shoot as I ride. Fernald, come with me or else stay here. I have my work cut out for me!"

With that, he swung the head of his horse away, and jogged briskly up the valley toward the rise of land beyond which, according to the Mexican, were Brennan's men and the women, or what seemed women, that he escorted.

Robert would have followed at once had it not been that the Mexican suddenly grasped his bridle reins and fell on his knees under the nose of Pinto.

"If you go, you are a dead man—beyond that ridge lies death or a terrible betrayal!" cried Oñate.

Robert looked down into a face that was convulsed with emotion, a fat, broad face that quivered and shook and turned pale with the greatness of his feelings.

"Pedrillo," said Robert kindly, "I believe that you have my interests at

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heart. I know that you wish what is best for me——"

"Alas, señor," said Pedrillo, beginning to weep, "I love you like a father, and like a son. I have been an evil man. I have done much wickedness. I have lied to you terribly. But now believe me. Do not ride over that ridge!"

"Take your hand from my reins," said Robert Fernald a little sternly. "I believe that you love me, Pedrillo. But I tell you, if there were ten thousand fighting men on the other side of that rise I would have to go with Parker against them!"

Pedrillo released the reins. He fell face down in the sands, sobbing heavily, so that his whole great body shook and trembled like marsh land underfoot.

Robert gave him a final glance, shook his head as though banishing from his mind any last indecision, and galloped Pinto swiftly after Parker, who was now riding up the slope beyond.

After him came the voice of Pedrillo, thick, choked with sobs: "Señor Parker is a traitor! A traitor! Name of Heaven and the Virgin, do not go with him!" But Robert closed his ears to the warning voice.

He called loudly to Parker, and the latter turned in the saddle and waved, as though to call him on.

It was plain that the big foreman did not intend to turn back, but to keep on and cross the ridge alone, to begin the battle. It filled the heart of Robert with a great burst of faith in humanity. Never before had he seen such heroism as this of Dan's. And he leaned forward in his saddle and jockeyed Pinto into a racing stride. Even so, he could not quite come up with the other.

He saw Parker, a few lengths before him, drive over the crest; he heard the shout of the foreman; and then the rapid explosions from the rifle of the big fellow as he charged down the other slope. Then Pinto flicked over the summit, and in the hollow Robert saw a band of four men, and two figures of women, one sitting in a side saddle.

The next instant, guns spoke from the hollow, and big Dan Parker reeled heavily in the saddle, and fell forward, clutching blindly at the pommel of his saddle!

CHAPTER XIII.

FALLEN WARRIORS.

WHEN Robert Fernald saw this happen, he knew that Parker was gone, so far as that fight was concerned; and Parker being gone, Robert gave himself up for dead. Had there been two or three men in that hollow —even such great fighters as Brennan and his gang—he would have felt that there was a ghost of a chance; but when he looked down, he saw the four ready, alert, guns in hand, and he knew that he could not crush them all.

He did not turn back, or waver for an instant. But suddenly he saw the sublime logic in this event. For the whole last part of his life, he had been pointing straight toward this instant. For had he not been roving here and there, searching out the great adventure, matching himself with impossible deeds? Now had come the deed which truly was impossible. He must fail, but he would fail gloriously, with a smoking gun in either hand. He offered up only one prayer from his strange, half-childish, unworldly heart, and this was that Heaven would deliver at least two of these men into his hand before the remaining pair shot him to bits.

He was about to straighten Pinto at the enemy when he heard a wild wailing cry behind him, and, looking over his shoulder for an instant, he had sight of the strangest picture, perhaps, that ever dawned upon human sight;

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and that was of the Mexican, charging over the brow of the hill to do battle with his master, and yelling as he came: "Halt, señor! In the name of Heaven, let me die beside you!"

What madness, then, had made Pedrillo spring from the ground, fling himself upon his mule and come flying to the rescue! Was it the working of a painful conscience? Was it a vast devotion to his master, a devotion unsuspected by Pedrillo himself until the great moment came? Who could tell? Perhaps it was a blending of all of these things that animated Pedrillo.

But Fernald, amazed and staggered, merely shouted back to Pedrillo to save himself, and then turned Pinto toward the men in the hollow.

Three of them waited for him there, and now he saw that the seeming ladies had sprung down from their horses and thrown off their trailing mantles. They were men! A sort of masked battery, now ready to be turned upon Fernald in case of need.

Six to one! The thing became almost ridiculous. But Robert did not hesitate!

How should he? How could he, being what he was, when he saw one figure detach itself from the rest and come straight out to meet him?

Yes, there was the magnificent form of big Brennan riding toward him. A gust of wind, or perhaps a desire to have his head free, had made the gun fighter cast his hat aside, and his long gray hair blew back from his face as he came forward at a gentle canter. Brennan! What a vast lifting of the soul there was in Robert at that moment! Now, at least, he would be sure of destroying one of the band, and the most important of all! Brennan must go down before him!

Yes, in either hand Robert felt an utter surety, such as comes to a self-devoted man. He felt that neither of the revolvers which he poised could possibly miss. And he laughed with a fierce joy; and Brennan, riding forth to meet this enemy, saw the laughter of grim ecstasy.

Yet Brennan did not turn back, and he did not swerve! Instead, he brought his pony to a halt and jerked the rifle to his shoulder.

"High and to the right!" said Robert, looking at the level of the weapon. As though his words had directed the bullet, it flew above his head and to the side. The rifle spoke again—and the bullet hummed closer to the head of Fernald.

Then he fired in turn. He was at rather long range, but he had no thought of missing. Carelessly, half-blindly, as a good pistol shot will do, he snapped his gun into place and fired. And then he opened his eyes with amazement.

Brennan had not fallen!

No, there he sat in his saddle, the wind ruffling his long hair into waves of silver, his rifle poised for the third shot.

Yes, and he was smiling!

The very bottom of the world fell out, for Robert. He had missed! Missed utterly—and the target was a man and a horse! As fast as he could pull trigger, he showered five bullets from alternate guns.

Behold, there sat Brennan upon his horse, his rifle still poised for the finishing shot—and every one of Robert's bullets had failed of its mark!

A sort of hysterical cold came upon Robert Fernald, then. He was closing upon the outlaw with the last fury of Pinto's rush.

He cast aside the guns which had failed him. He drew the long hunting knife from his belt, and he waved it above his head with a shout.

A change came in the face of Brennan; the smile went out; the gun spoke loudly. And poor Pinto pitched down head foremost in death.

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Over his head he flung his rider. Robert saw a blue flash of heaven lit blindingly by the westering sun, and then all light went out.

And as the darkness rushed across his senses, he heard the scream of the Mexican far behind him as the other guns spoke.

Had Pedrillo gone down, too?

Yes, and in exactly the same fashion. The rifle of Brennan had spoken at the proper moment as he saw Oñate plunging down the slope at him. A wild picture! For Oñate had seized the reins in his teeth, and so left his arm free to grasp his revolver. He came on, shooting blindly, foolishly. The steady rifle of Brennan was tipped up; it spoke; and the mule rolled in death, and cast Pedrillo far ahead, and laid him senseless.

So here were two of the three assailants helpless upon the ground.

Brennan's men rushed eagerly around them. Oñate had a leg twisted under him, unquestionably broken and broken badly! But Robert Fernald lay face up, with a bloody gash upon his brow. No, he was merely stunned, unless there were internal injuries.

What of Dan Parker? It was a most amazing thing to see him ride straight in on the Brennan band, and when he was among them stop his horse and drop to his feet—then sink upon a rock.

"In the name of Heaven, are they both dead?" cried Parker, white of face.

Brennan himself came back to Parker.

"They're not dead," he declared. "They'll come around in time, but they're out for a few minutes. Old boy, you played a good part there! But even at that, I thought I was going to be a gone goose at the last minute. Look here!"

He pointed to the hunting knife of Fernald, sticking deep in his saddle.

"He threw it as his horse fell," said Brennan. "And bless my heart if I didn't think I was gone when I seen that streak of silver! And every shot that he fired was a bull's-eye, Dan. He sprinkled me with lead dust every time. Look here!"

He pointed to his shirt; it was flecked with dots of black.

"What did you put in those slugs, Dan?" he asked.

"It was a hunch that I got a long time ago," grinned Parker. "It's lead, you see. Real lead. But it's only crystals that are packed in under an outer film. It looks smooth and hard, and it weighs like lead. But when you fire, it scatters like dust in the air. Now, for Heaven's sake get his fallen guns and his cartridge belt and load them with real bullets, will you? Since I put in the phony ones at our camp, last night, I've been in a stew."

"Afraid that he'd take a crack at something along the way?" Brennan nodded understandingly.

"Yes, and find out that there was something wrong with the ammunition, you understand?"

"Chuck," said Brennan, "get the belt off Fernald and line it with new bullets. Same number that there are in it. Shake the cartridges out of his guns, too, and put in real ones. We'd have nothing but wasted work if he was ever to find out! And here, Sam, help to get a bandage around Parker's head, will you? Prick your finger and get some blood on it. It's got to look as though you were grazed by a bullet and knocked silly that way, Dan!"

Four of the men were working over the fallen warriors, and now they could hear the loud groaning of the Mexican up the slope, though still he was unconscious.

In the meantime, the bandage was wrapped around the head of Parker. His gun belt was taken away, and his hands were tied before him.

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"Will it do any good, though?" said Parker. "Ain't he going to find out?"

"If he finds out," said Brennan, with a shudder, "God help us! I was a dead man six times, Dan. I never seen such shooting from the back of a running horse! Six times he dusted me! And when I seen him coming like a madman —the first two bullets I fired to kill— and missed. Then I seen that you'd done your work right, when he opened fire. So I waited, and let the poor horse have it at the last jump. If it's possible to break the nerve of any man, Dan, this ought to keep Fernald from wearing guns again. But—I have my doubts! He's a wild cat! He ain't human!"

"And if he should ever guess!" said Parker with a groan. "If he ever should guess that this was a put-up job! Why, the greaser had a hunch at the last minute and I thought that I was a gone goose. Would have been, except that Fernald never suspects any one whom he calls a friend."

"A hard job," sighed Brennan. "I wish that I'd never started it. But who could resist, with a girl like her cryin' and beggin' for my help! She loves him, Dan, the way that few men ever have been loved."

"Aye," said Parker, "and besides, she's paying big! What did you do with the pair of them?"

"Just as we planned. They shifted from their horses at the point where Chuck and Sam met us. Took their horses and headed for Larkin Valley. And there they're waiting for news. I'll send in a boy with the good word —if you can call it good!"

CHAPTER XIV.

STILL UNSATISFIED.

NO hint of these happenings came to Robert, of course, as he lay senseless. And when he recovered and opened his eyes, he saw nothing to betray the plot which had revolved so cunningly around him. What he observed was Dan Parker, his hands bound together before him, his head encircled by a blood-stained bandage; and then, as he sat up, Robert heard the terrible groaning of Pedrillo Oñate, who, in turn, had recovered his senses, urged on by an incessant spur of sharp pain.

Brennan in person was at work over the Mexican. Men said that, in early days, the lone rider had been a doctor. At least, it was certain that he knew much of the ways of a healer. And now he was putting his art to a practical use, as he incased the broken leg of the Mexican in rudely improvised splints. A great dram of brandy gave Pedrillo force to endure his present pain. His groans diminished. Now Robert, his own hands tied in front of him, was permitted to go to poor Oñate and sit beside him.

A flash of joy struck across the face of the Mexican. His eyes glittered with happiness. "They told me that you were alive, señor," said he. "But I thought that the devils were lying. Glorious Virgin of Guadalupe! It is because I vowed six tall candlesticks of pure beeswax. She saved you! She turned the bullets from you and made them strike Pinto! Señor, little father, let me have your hand and feel that it is yourself, and not a ghost that is here and—Hai! Hellfire take them! They are killing me! Stop them, little father!"

He clung to the hand of Robert, and remained clinging to it until the operation was finished. Then another dram of brandy, combined with the exhaustion of great pain and the after effects of a shock of nervous excitement, washed Pedrillo deep into a gulf of sleep.

Brennan, stiff-lipped and stern from the surgical work which he had been doing, stood back from the Mexican

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and looked to Robert Fernald with a faint smile.

"How did you manage it, Fernald?" asked he. "What medicine did you use to turn this great hulk of a coward into a hero to-day?"

Fernald made no reply, but he looked steadfastly into the face of the older man. It seemed to him that infinite wisdom was gathered in the calm, courageous eyes of the famous criminal. It seemed to him that he felt the power of soul which had beaten him from his horse and brought about his fall.

And, falling, he had not been able to bring down a single one of his enemies! He could not understand. Striving to understand, he struck upon one possible solution:

It was the force of a superior warrior which had beaten him. It was the overplus of a conqueror which had deprived him of his ability. Something in the dauntless bearing of Brennan, riding out to the encounter single-handed, had served to unman Robert. For that matter, he could recall other instances when nerves had worked on his own behalf and had made famous gun fighters almost as helpless as children before him. He thought of some of those other occasions now, and he felt the full irony of his fate. And then a fiery pang struck through his head from the wound on his forehead.

Presently they prepared to march. A litter was made for Pedrillo and slung between two horses, then the party journeyed on up the valley, turned sharply into a little twisting ravine, and, where the stream spread in a small pool, they made their camp.

Robert was with Pedrillo, who was coming back to his senses again with deep groans and occasional loud yells of pain.

"Patience, señor!" said the Mexican. "We shall have them yet. If they cannot be trailed to this place, all the men in the desert are blind as bats. Patience, señor. A moment's patience is a ten years' comfort, and he that can be patient finds his foe at his feet. They will trail us here and bag all the villains, señor!"

Robert could not reply except to say: "Be quiet, Pedrillo. Keep your strength. You have been through a great deal. Now save yourself. God knows how long it will be before you can be moved from this place to the care of a good doctor."

"Señor," said the Mexican, "you give me foolish advice and worse comfort. God defend me from all doctors, I say first of all. When the doctor comes in at one door, death comes in by another. Death is the shadow of the doctor, señor. And it is by death that the doctor lives! No, God defend me from doctors, I say! And above all, do not tell me to be silent. If it is not for the music of my own tongue, I shall go mad thinking of the pain in which I lie here. Let me talk and talk, señor, for talking stops thinking, as drinking stops thirst! Let my tongue be busy with words, or my throat will be busy with screams! And stay close to me, little father, for no one will listen to me with half your patience!"

In this manner Pedrillo talked, twisting himself to and fro, and never resting until Robert had propped up his head a little. He rolled a cigarette for Oñate, and the latter smoked it with great sighs of relief. But still he talked, making the smoke bubble and break at his lips. He talked, indeed, until he seemed quite to forget his pain from the broken leg.

"He doesn't need an opiate," said Brennan, pausing to listen. "Not so long as he can keep hinges on his tongue!"

When Pedrillo at last fell asleep again, Robert had a chance to talk with Parker. The two were left quite alone, and allowed to talk freely and secretly

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with one another. Their hands were bound, and they were not spied upon unnecessarily; but there were two of Brennan's young men constantly on guard, their rifles across their knees when they were seated, or tucked under one arm as the guards walked up and down. And there was something in the carelessness with which they handled those weapons that augured ill for the man who attempted to bolt to the shrubbery at the side of the ravine. There was something, too, in the keenness of their eyes, that discouraged any attempt at trickery.

But Robert had no trick or shift in his mind. With his bound hands, he took the imprisoned ones of Parker and pressed them hard.

"Old fellow," said Fernald, "I've seen a good many brave things done. But I've never seen anything finer than the way you drove over the top of that hill. Only, tell me this, why did you do it? Why didn't you wait for me? Then we could have made the charge together and perhaps—God knows!—we might have done something, working together!"

Parker frowned at the ground and then peered at the dusky sky, for it was long after the sunset.

"It was Pedrillo," said he, speaking rapidly and in a mumbling voice. "It was Pedrillo. He'd tormented me with his infernal tongue. I had to do something to show you——"

Here he stuck, and frowned again at the ground.

"Tush!" said Robert. "As though I could have doubted you! As though I could have doubted you for a second! But—what do you think Brennan will do with us?"

"God knows," said Parker. "It seems that his main idea, after the ladies gave him the slip in the middle of the desert and after he found that we were following, was to trap you and fight with you hand to hand."

Dan managed to raise his head and look Robert in the eye. But Robert was staring gloomily into the distance.

"He wanted to beat you," went on Parker, "and——"

"And he did it," said Robert sadly. "But now, what?"

"I think he's holding you in the hope that if he could not keep Miss Larkin for ransom, at least he may be able to make her ransom you!"

Robert shook his head.

"Why not?" asked Parker. "We've both done something for her. And she has money enough to help us!"

"It would do me no good," said Robert. "I've been thinking the thing out, you see."

"Thinking to what end?" asked Parker, his voice turning very sharp.

"For you, yes. The ransom would be all very well for you, Dan. Of course you should get your freedom. But it's a different matter with me."

"I don't see that."

"It's this way. I never could live happily, remembering how I stood up to one man, and was beaten like that!"

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. I mean that I have to have another chance at Brennan. Now, or later."

"Another chance?" cried Parker. "But, old fellow, don't you see how it is? He met you fairly and squarely. He beat you, certainly. You can't expect to be the best man in the world, you know."

"I understand that he's the better man," said Robert, falling back into his gloomy thought. "And I'd rather be a dead man than a living man with that thought. He beat me fairly and squarely, as you say. And I wish that the bullet had killed me instead of dropping poor Pinto. That was a brave little cayuse, Dan!"

He sighed.

"You mean," interpreted Parker,

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"that if you're ransomed here, you'll keep on the trail of Brennan until you have a chance to fight the thing out with him again?"

"Of course," answered Robert. "There's nothing else for me to do, really!"

Parker said no more. He fell into a brown study, and his reflections did not seem to be very pleasant ones. In the meantime a camp fire had been lighted. Brennan and another came back from a brief hunting tour of the ravine loaded with rabbits for the evening meal. And in a few short moments the odor of roasted meat was drifting across the air.

The stars came out, the dim and distant desert stars. The hungry men were so silent that, now and again, one could hear the horses grinding their forage in the darkness. The fire crackled merrily. Never had there been a scene of greater peace. But for two there was no beauty in the scene—to Robert, seated on a fallen log and staring at the stars with sightless eyes of thought; to Parker, who hunted out Brennan for a private conference.

CHAPTER XV.

A MOMENT FROM HEAVEN.

BRENNAN, for his part, seemed in the best of spirits. After all, he had undertaken a most delicate and ticklish business and had brought it through to an apparently triumphant issue with the secret help of Dan Parker. Therefore, he was whistling softly as he took his share of roasted rabbit to one side and sat down to eat. There Parker joined him. He sat in silence, regardless of the share of food which had been given to him.

"Hello," said Brennan, "is there sand in that meat, Dan?"

"Damn the meat!" said Parker.

"You didn't get your slug of coffee, then?"

"Damn the coffee!" said Parker.

"Then, what's wrong?"

"It's as wrong as any man could wish," declared Parker sourly.

"What's wrong?"

"Guess, then."

"You mean the kid? Why, he seems to be pretty well in hand. He ain't said a word, hardly."

"He never was a talking kind," mused Parker. "When he first come up to Larkin Valley, I used to bullyrag him a little. I thought he was a cross between a fool and a coward. And he didn't say nothing. All that he did was to go out one day, and come back with Tom Gill in tow. No, the kid never was great on talking!"

"What are you aiming at with that?" demanded Brennan briskly, but lowering his voice. "What's your drift, Dan?"

"Why," explained Parker, "what's the main job, here?"

"To bust the spirit of the kid and show him that he ain't almighty with a gun. What else?"

"Nothin' else," said Parker. "That's exactly the main job. To sort of gentle him down, so's he'll be willing to retire to Larkin Ranch and marry the finest girl in the world and settle down with her. That's the main job."

"It's done," said Brennan with decision. "He's had his lesson."

"Old son," said Parker, "he's just after telling me that he'll never live happy until he's had a chance to fight the thing out with you again!"

"Fury and fire!" breathed Brennan. "Do you mean that?"

"I mean that. Now, how will it be for you, Tiger, to stand up to that kid again?"

"I'll see him hanged first!" said Brennan without the slightest hesitation. "He dusted me with six bullets running. I was a dead man six times over before I managed to bring down his horse. No, no, Dan! I take my

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chance with any man, even old as I am; but I don't take any chances with a shooting machine like that same kid! Missing a shot just ain't in his make-up!"

"Suppose he's ransomed? Then he immediately starts on your trail and sticks to it until he gets a chance to——"

"I'd simply have the boys lay for him and massacre him, Parker. Suicide ain't in my line."

Parker lighted a cigarette, and he sighed deeply.

"He's over there admiring you," explained Parker. "He's been telling me how much better a man you are than him. And at the same time, he couldn't live, y'understand, knowing that he's been beat, even when he was beat fair and square. But suppose, Tiger, just supposin', he should ever get wind of what really happened—or even should he find out that I really wasn't knocked silly by a bullet but that I was in the game on your side from the start——"

Tiger Brennan whistled.

Then he added: "We'll wait till we get word from Miss Larkin. Then we'll see. We'll see what's to happen!"

So they waited. And the messenger sent to the Larkin Ranch returned the next morning before noon with a letter for Brennan. The letter was brief, and amazingly to the point:

You've done wonderfully well. I hardly see how you managed it. I'm inclosing another check for five thousand. Just to show you how I appreciate the skill you've used. Get Fernald to the ranch as fast as you can. And, for Heaven's sake, never let him guess how this has happened!

Then Brennan called Parker and young Robert Fernald before him.

"Boys," said he, "I'm mighty glad to say that Miss Larkin didn't waste no time. She's sent down the coin that I needed. And so the pair of you can go free. But you don't go free until you make a bargain with me. I've used you a bit rough, and no doubt you have a hankering to get even with me. Now, lads, I want your promise to me that you'll never take my trail and never pull a gun against me. I'll take your word for that, because you're a pair of honorable gents."

"Certainly!" said Parker. "I'm not fool enough to want any more of your game, Tiger. Here's my hand on it!"

"Thanks, Parker. Then you're free. Wait till I cut this rope. There you are!"

The rope fell instantly from the hands of Parker, and Brennan directed one of his men to restore the guns and belt to the liberated prisoner. Then he turned to young Fernald.

"The same deal goes with you, Fernald," he said kindly. "Just shake on this deal and——"

"I think you mean very well in this," said Fernald. "But the trouble is, Brennan, that I can't do it."

"And why not, then?"

"Because, sooner or later, I've got to get at you, Brennan. We've had one fight, and all the winning has gone to you. Perhaps you're a better man. But I want to stand up to you once more and finish the deal. Living is no good to me, with a better man just around the corner!"

Brennan strode close and towered above Robert five feet and eight inches.

"Kid," cried he, "are you plain batty? Are you askin' me to blow you to hell? Because once there, I can't blow you back again!"

Fernald merely smiled. It seemed that this blustering only served to give him more strength of purpose.

"The sun is right over our heads," said he, "and so it can't shine in the eyes of either of us. Why not take this time, Brennan? Why not take this time and have it out? I'd as soon be buried here as anywhere!"

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Brennan turned on his heel and strode away.

"You've made a fool of yourself," said Parker anxiously to Robert. "You've really made quite a rare fool of yourself. Let me call him back!"

"Why did he quit me?" asked Robert, bewildered.

"Because he's not an idiot," said Parker, with a ready wit. "He's beaten you once, and let you live. Why should he risk himself against you a second time—even if the risk isn't much? He's a gold digger, not a gambler, Bob!"

Brennan, sitting apart, turned the matter back and forth in his mind. He sat in the deep shadow of a projecting rock. All was deadly still in the shallow ravine. It seemed as though the fire of the sun had burned all life out of everything. Even the air was still, and not a breath stirred through the dry leaves of the shrubbery. The horses shrank the skin on their backs, time and again, as though to escape from the unceasing fall of fire that burned them; and the men mopped their foreheads incessantly.

For a half hour or more Brennan remained lost in his brooding. Then he rose with a grim face. He looked up and pointed to two or three small black spots in the sky.

"Let the buzzards finish this argument," he said.

Watching, waiting eyes were fixed upon him.

"Let the buzzards have the last word," said he. "I've offered this fellow his life; he won't have it on decent terms. Well, that's the end of him. Fernald, you're going to die here like a dog!"

Fernald stiffened a little.

"If you do it, Brennan," said he, "you'll be more detested than a mad dog through the range."

"I'll take my chance on that. Boys, stand him against that wall, will you? And give me that new Colt——"

"Wait a minute, chief," said big Charlie Dashwood, gray with disgust and fear. "D'you mean that you're going to butcher him like—like a pig?"

"And what have you to say to that?" roared Brennan; but as he whirled on Dashwood, he winked, a broad and solemn wink, seen not only by Charlie but by the rest of the band.

"All right," said Dashwood, frowning to keep from smiling. "I'll stand him up for you. Bandage his eyes?"

"No, no!" said Robert. "You needn't fear that I'll dodge. And—I want to see it coming!"

He himself stepped back against the appointed wall.

Brennan cursed softly. And then: "Hold on," he cried. "It ain't right that the master should go before the man. Bring out the greaser and prop him up against the wall!"

It was done. But when poor Oñate saw what was contemplated he screamed like a woman.

"Señor Brennan, noble and kind señor, I'll be your slave. I never will betray you! I'll be truer to you than to Señor Fernald. Bah! What is he to me? What is he compared with a great man like you, señor! But do not kill me! Oh, my God! I have a mother—and an old father—I have seven children to starve without me—I am——"

"A pair of you hold him up by each shoulder," said the cruel Brennan.

"Señor Brennan, I swear that I shall give you my solemn honor!"

"Bah!" said Brennan. "You have no honor, you yellow swine! Hold him up, boys, and I'll soon have this over——"

He balanced the revolver in his hand. Oñate was supported on either side, so that his breast was open to the bullet.

"One moment," said Oñate with a changed voice. "I defy you and spit

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in your face, dog of a pirate and cutthroat. Señor Fernald, little father, pity me and forgive me! I denied you because I loved life. But if God gave me the right to die for you and so set you free, I should go to my death smiling. Tell me that you believe me, little father!"

"Ready!" said Brennan. "Say your last prayer, greaser, if you've got one to say!"

"Señor," said Oñate to Fernald, overlooking the threat of the ready gun, "we meet in heaven. It is only one moment of pain. Adios, amigo!"

"Brennan!" shouted Fernald.

Brennan stepped back a little, and scowled at his prisoner.

"Don't fire on him," gasped Robert Fernald. "I'll give you my word—I'll do whatever you want!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE END OF THE STORY.

SO, by the wit and cruel imagination of Tiger Brennan, Fernald was tamed and his career as a slayer of men was brought to an end. An untimely end, in some respects, one might call it. For if he had gone on with his red-handed work, there is no telling to what strange heights of adventure he might have scaled.

For these were the terms imposed on him by Brennan: Never to seek the society of a dangerous man; never to respond to a challenge to fight; never to draw a weapon, except in the actual defense of his life.

And this, of course, was to condemn him never to fight at all, for with the reputation which had been built up by Robert, there was not one chance in ten thousand that he would ever encounter a man rash enough to rush into war with him. Ten men could be controlled by one fearless hero whose skill with a gun had been proved. And so it would be with Robert Fernald. If he were forced to give up the making of trouble, then trouble most assuredly would not dare to seek out Fernald.

It was in this manner that the terms were concluded. Fernald groaned and buried his face in his hands, as he saw himself shut off from all chance of vengeance upon Brennan, shut off, too, from his avowed duty of executing the wrath of Sim Burgess upon McCoy—the villain. But, as an alternative, he was told by Brennan that he could have the pleasure of seeing his faithful Pedrillo placed against a wall and shot through the heart.

So Robert submitted. And an odd document was drawn up by the hand of Brennan, stating in exact terms what was to be done. "Because," said Brennan, "your memory might fail you one of these days, but I'll keep a copy, and you'll keep the other. And there you are!"

How did it happen that Brennan was willing to trust merely to the pledged word of this man who was a stranger to him? Well, Robert was not really a stranger to any one in the West. All men had heard about his exploits, and all men knew a good deal about his work with guns and men; above all, he was famous for an unstained honor which never yet had broken faith upon great matters or upon small. So Brennan was willing to trust.

Half an hour later, Tiger Brennan was gone with his men, disappearing in a whirlwind of dust up the ravine, and leaving Robert, the stricken Pedrillo, and Dan Parker without horses, without food, without so much as a hunting knife as means of helping themselves.

However, they did not have long in which to wonder what would come of them. Over the edge of the western hill they heard the rattling of hoofs, and there came down into the ravine half a dozen stanch riders, who were recognized afar by Parker as member

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of his own crew, workers on the Larkin Ranch. They greeted Parker with much noisy enthusiasm. They greeted Robert Fernald with an awed respect, such as he received from most men from that time until the day of his death. And even to Pedrillo they showed a singular amount of attention.

They made a litter for him, the softest that could be fashioned, and started the trek across the hills, climbing up and up to the beautiful, cool meadow lands of the Larkin Valley and the Larkin Ranch.

Robert and Dan Parker walked together behind the procession for a time, but Robert was terribly in the dumps, and he could not raise his head to talk. So Parker hurried on to the others. They left Robert trailing behind, breathing their dust, the most bedraggled and woebegone figure that one could imagine. Certainly no one could have selected him now in this sad, dejected mood as one who would make a possible hero!

And, in the meantime, the party in the lead made merry, badgering Pedrillo.

"You greaser scoundrel," a grinning cow-puncher would say, "tell me how come that you offered to let Brennan shoot you? D'you think that his bullets was made of paper, maybe?"

Pedrillo lay back in his bed of pine branches and puffed cigarettes and smiled upon them, for he was content with the world.

"Great things cannot be understood by little men," Pedrillo would say. "Pardon, señor, but you throw your shadow upon me!"

So they laughed and tormented one another. But Pedrillo knew that he had left the ranks of the rogues and, against his own fondest expectations, established himself among the ranks of honest men. It made him feel very dizzy; but it made him feel that God was very great, being able to accomplish even such a miracle as this!

So the caravan wound on toward the upper plateau, reached it, and came in sight of the house, where a solitary rider swept toward them—beautiful Beatrice Larkin, her face drawn and her eyes brilliant.

"But where's the man you went to get?" she asked, cruelly overlooking Parker and poor Pedrillo. "Where's Bobbie Fernald? Where's he?"

He had disappeared.

"I'll get him in five minutes!" said Parker, turning pale. "He was with us, I'd swear, not long ago—he must be back beyond that stretch of hummocks."

She cast one terrible and blasting glance upon him, and then her horse darted away; and the others rushed off, also, scattering here and there in a wild search.

But it was Beatrice who found him—far back—five miles back—in the center of a little circle of poplars that stood around a spring. There he was, sitting beside the pool, his face in his hands.

And when she rushed her horse through the trees and cried out at the sight of him, he did not raise his head.

She flung herself out of the saddle and ran to him.

"Bobbie, Bobbie! I thought you were lost!"

"I am," said he, and stood before her. "I'm lost, Beatrice, shamed, disgraced, and done for. No man will ever want me for a friend again!"

"And the women, Bobbie?" she asked.

"No proud woman ever would want me in her house as a friend," said he.

"Perhaps not; but as a husband, Bobbie—that would be a rather different thing."

"You're making a joke of me, Beatrice," said Robert, with a sad dignity.

"Only half, Bobbie," said she.

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Certainly she never stopped laughing at him, even when he was the father of her children; and certainly even the cow-punchers on the place used to smile as he went by; for to the end he remained rather a shrinking figure. And one hardly could have said whether or not he was a happy man. At least in many a way he was never truly content. There were only two people in the world who could make him laugh.

One was his wife.

The other was Pedrillo, who never left that valley so long as he lived.

There is another matter which must be mentioned. Burgess failed to harm McCoy; and Burgess himself was killed by the kick of a powerful little mule.

As for the enormous hoax of the pretended kidnaping of Beatrice Larkin and her aunt, rumors about it flew everywhere; certainly big Brennan never was accused of it as of a crime, but as of a joke; but no convincing tale of the truth ever came to the ears of Robert Fernald. He had passed into a mildly happy dream. But still his eyes were fixed on the wild heights of life, and he despised the quiet ways in which he found himself.

IMPROVING THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY

THE favorite summer route for motorists driving across the continent is the Lincoln Highway. Every year improvements are made in this famous route, the expenditures from 1913 to 1926 inclusive having amounted to about ninety million dollars. Over fifteen million dollars was spent in 1926 alone for construction work on the road.

Some of the reasons for the popularity of the Lincoln Highway in summer are that it furnishes the shortest and most improved route across the continent, that it gives ready access to the Rocky Mountains, and the Yellowstone and Yosemite Parks, and that it avoids the terrific heat of the Mojave Desert and the late opening and early closing Sierra passes of the Northwest.

The distance between New York and San Francisco by the Lincoln Highway is 3,142.6 miles. There is a choice of routes after leaving Fallon, Nevada, and the above figure represents the distance if the southern trail by way of Carson City and along the southern shores of Lake Tahoe is followed. In taking the more northerly course through Reno, past Donner Lake and Truckee, California, the journey is a little longer and brings the total distance from coast to coast up to 3,331.5 miles.

Of this great stretch of roadway, only forty-one miles are unimproved. This forty-one miles comprises a stretch of natural dirt road in western Utah. When the season is favorable this stretch is as good as many improved roads, but it should be avoided in wet weather. It has never been improved and no maintenance work is done on it. Many motorists avoid it by turning into the Oregon Trail at Granger, Wyoming, and reaching the Pacific coast at Portland.

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Dangling Doom

By W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Desert Speed," etc.

IT was very quiet up there in the land of the big snows; very quiet and very cold. A thermometer, if there had been such a thing, would probably have showed twenty below. There was a little sunshine, which threw dull shadows from the snow-covered firs and tamaracks, but it was as cold as moonlight.

A moose bird, soft flying as a gray shadow, dipped down a ravine which in summer held a brawling stream, but where now the ten-foot firs barely showed their tips above the snow. There were no tracks of bird or rabbit, and even the pine squirrel kept to his burrow in the old pine snags.

But there was a track out there through the dim aisles of the trees, a huge track—the trail of snowshoes. A close observer might have noted that the tracks were irregular, not at all like the tracks of one who is sure of his step.

Along this trail came a man, humped over, traveling slowly, a rifle in the crook of his left arm. The fur collar of his parkalike coat extended almost to the top of his fur cap in the back, and his black-bearded face seemed like a continuation of the cap and collar. He wore thick gray woolen trousers tucked inside heavy stockings, and on his feet were Indian-made moccasins.

On his back was a small pack wrapped in blankets, and from the belt of his coat dangled a short-handled ax. His snowshoes were of the bear-paw design, homemade, while the tracks he was following had been made by an ordinary factory type of shoe.

Suddenly the man stopped short, sniffing the wind. To his nostrils came the scent of wood smoke. He seemed more alert now and crouched forward on his snowshoes, swinging the rifle from his left arm to both hands. But there was nothing to be seen except the moose bird, sitting motionless on a bare snag.

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The man went slowly forward, following the tracks which suddenly turned down the slope of the little gully toward a clump of spreading firs. Beyond this clump was the open side of the hill, unmarked by track of any kind. From the man's position he could see the gully above the trees, and that was also unmarked.

He stripped off his heavy mitten, and his bare right hand clutched the grip of his cocked rifle. He could see the tiny streamer of smoke now. With scarcely a sound he moved forward, circling the clump at close range.

He stopped short. Within ten feet of him was a dying fire, and just beyond it, huddled against the butt of a balsam fir, lay a figure wrapped in blankets. The sleeper had taken the precaution of piling up the snow for a windbreak and gathering a considerable quantity of firewood. Just beside the fire grew a lodge-pole sapling possibly six inches thick at the butt, and about sixteen or eighteen feet tall, branchless for nearly its whole distance.

The trailer moved closer, holding the rifle in such a position that it covered the sleeping man. A rifle had been placed against the branches beside the blanketed figure. The newcomer secured this and stepped back.

"Wake up and pay for yore lodgin'!" he growled, his voice ringing sharp in the clear air.

For several moments the sleeper did not move. Then, his head lifted slightly and his sleepy eyes stared at the man who stood beside the fire. He was also bearded almost to the eyes, with a scraggly growth of red whiskers, and even his eyes were red, as though inflamed.

Slowly he sat up, gazing always at the man with the rifle.

"Who are you?" he growled harshly.

"Deputy sheriff from Galena."

"Oh, yea-a-ah!"

A glance showed him that his rifle had been removed.

"Deputy sheriff, eh? Well, what do yuh want, deputy sheriff?"

"You."

"Me?" The man laughed. "Yuh might tell me why?"

"For killin' Al Weed in Galena three days ago."

"Yea-a-ah?"

"Yea-a-ah! Thought you'd snowshoe over into the Cœur d'Alene, eh?"

"I don't know Al Weed."

"Then what did yuh shoot him for?"

"Didn't know I had."

"Didn't, eh? What's yore name?"

"None of yore business."

The deputy shook the mitten off his left hand, dug in his pocket and drew out a pair of handcuffs.

"Put yore hands out," he ordered. "No fool moves, or I'll kill yuh. I've been on yore trail for three days, and I'll take no chances."

The handcuffs clicked around the man's wrists, and the deputy stepped back with a sigh of relief.

"I hope yo're satisfied," said the prisoner. "Yuh don't mind if I keep my hands under the blankets, will yuh? It's awful cold."

"Git up!" snapped the deputy, pointing the rifle at him.

The man slowly got to his feet, and the deputy picked up a heavy Colt which had been inside the blanket.

"No wonder yore hands got cold," he sneered. "Yo're a tough jigger, eh? C'me here."

Holding the revolver in one hand, he unlocked the cuff from one wrist, jerked the man's arms on each side of the lodge-pole sapling, and snapped the cuff on again.

"I reckon that'll hold yuh for a while," he said, and began building up the fire. With the flames leaping merrily, he turned to his grub pack.

"How're yuh fixed for grub?"

"Not a crumb," replied the prisoner.

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"I seen where yuh killed a snowshoe rabbit yesterday."

"Ate it all last night. This is a hard country to live off of in the winter. Mind loanin' me my blanket? I'm too far from the fire for it to do me any good."

"I'll loan yuh nothin'. Now, what do yuh think of that?"

"Want to take me back frozen, eh? Must be expectin' a spell of hot weather."

The deputy did not reply. He was melting snow in a small pot for his coffee. The prisoner's inflamed eyes watched him for a while and then glanced up the tree. He was most surely in a position from which there was little hope of escape. Finally he looked at the kneeling deputy.

"Who was this here Al Weed?" he asked.

"Gambler," growled the deputy, fanning the smoke away from his eyes. "You ort to know. You killed him."

"Never heard of him in my life."

"Suits me. Do you make a practice of goin' round the country killin' strangers? Oh, several folks saw yuh. You was in the store not ten minutes before yuh shot him. I was in the saloon myself. Started to come out along with Weed, but the bartender spoke to me and I went back. Al came to the doorway, and you shot him. A man on the other side of the street saw yuh shoot. I got on yore trail inside of thirty minutes and I've been on it ever since. You shore headed into a deserted end of the country, but I figured you was tryin' for the Cœur d'Alene."

"Regular bloodhound on webs, eh?"

"When I go after a man, I always git him."

"Yea-a-ah? Been a deputy all yore life?"

"Three year."

The deputy dumped some coffee in the pot and set it on the fire.

"Three years, eh? Allus lived around here?"

"Little over three year."

"Came here from up in the Okanagan, didn't yuh?"

The deputy jerked to his feet and stared at the prisoner. He came closer, peering at the man.

"Who are you?" he asked harshly.

"Chilcoot Evans."

"You? I don't believe it! Chilcoot Evans?"

"Now you know how it come that I killed Al Weed."

"I'll be—you thought he was me?"

"Hoped he was, you dirty crook! You a deputy! And takin' me back there for murder! Why don't yuh laugh?"

The deputy was speechless. He turned back to the fire and placed more wood on the flames, staring off at the blue-white of the forest evening.

"So yuh came back, didja?" he muttered.

"You didn't think I wouldn't, did yuh, Wibel?"

"Why didja come back, Chilcoot?"

"To kill yuh."

"Yea-a-ah?"

"For sendin' me up to serve life for what you done."

"For what I done, eh?"

The deputy stirred the coffee with a stick. He opened his pack and took out a couple of rolled hot-cakes. A moose bird flew in like a shadow, perched on a near-by limb, and ruffled its feathers. Perhaps it had visited camps before, and remembered that there might be a few crumbs.

"Yeah—for what *you* done," said the prisoner slowly. "You killed Harris yourself. Remember Jack McCord? He got sent up for three years for stealin' horses. I met him there. He finished his term a couple of days before I broke out, and he told me he saw you kill Harris that night and put yore gun in my pocket. I was too

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drunk to know what was done, but Jack saw it. He's there in Galena ready to testify, but I didn't want to send yuh up—I wanted to kill yuh."

The deputy turned his head and laughed wolfishly.

"Sounds good, Chilcoot. But I'm the deputy sheriff of this county, and yo're an escaped convict. Do yuh think I'm goin' to take yuh back with me and have all this come out? If yuh do, yo're crazy. I never did catch up with yuh, savvy?"

"Suits me. Anythin' is better than goin' back to the pen."

"Pretty nervy, Chilcoot. Got quite a lot of nerve for a killer, ain't yuh?"

"What do yuh mean by that? I'm no killer."

"No-o-o? Don't lie to me!"

The deputy got to his feet and came closer, his finger pointing straight into Chilcoot's face.

"Don't lie, you dog. You and Harris killed Sid Barker, my pardner, and stole what gold he had. Harris told me about it. He was drunk, too, crazy drunk; but he told the truth. He said you killed Sid with an ax. That's why I killed Harris and put the deadwood on you."

"You can't prove it," whined the prisoner.

"I know I can't. I couldn't prove it at that time. And that's why I done what I——" The moose bird dropped on the blanket roll and tried to drag away one of the cold cakes. The deputy flung his stick at the bird.

The prisoner laughed hollowly. "Funny, ain't it? Both of us murderers. Both of us up here in the big woods. It ort to be the survival of the fittest, as they say, Wibel. Turn me loose and I'll fight yuh for it with bare hands."

"Like fun I will!"

Wibel turned back to the fire. The air was growing colder now. They could hear the snapping of the pines as the air bit into them. Suddenly the deputy threw up his head. From far down the canyon came the snapping howl of a hunting wolf. The deputy turned his head and grinned at the prisoner whose hands were blue from the cold.

"Hear that? They're on our trail, Chilcoot. It's a bad winter on wolves. I'll go back and admit yuh beat me over the summit—and the wolves will destroy all evidence."

"You dirty coward! At least, move the fire over closer; I'm freezin', Wibel."

"Freeze then!"

Wibel lifted the can of coffee off the fire, got his rifle and laid it on the blanket beside him. His eyes scanned the dark forest behind.

"Scared, eh?" sneered Chilcoot.

Wibel placed wood on the fire until the dancing flames almost reached the lower branches of the fir.

"I'm freezin', I tell yuh!" wailed the prisoner. "Can't yuh give me a chance?"

"You ain't fit to live, Chilcoot."

"I'm as fit as you are. Unlock my hands and we'll fight it out. Both murderers; men with crooked brains. Do yuh believe in God, Wibel? Don't slop that coffee. If you've got too much, gimme some. Do yuh believe in Him, Wibel? Let yore God, or yore luck, whichever yuh call it, decide. Ain't yuh game to fight it out?"

"I'd be a fine sucker to take a chance, wouldn't I?"

"Yo're bigger than I am, Wibel. But it wouldn't be murder. Survival of the fittest, don't yuh see? Makes a kinda game endin' for a man. C'me on, Wibel. My hands are freezin'. One of my feet is froze already."

"Shut up! Feet freezin', eh? What's the difference? You'll all be stiff by mornin'. I jist noticed that you've got a good pair of moccasins on, Chilcoot. Yuh might as well will 'em

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to me. To-morrow mornin' I'll take 'em off yuh. But you won't never need 'em."

"Dead man's shoes," said Chilcoot hoarsely. "Don't do it, Wibel. Don'tcha know what that means? I'll haunt yuh. Dead man's shoes."

Wibel laughed harshly and got to his feet.

"All right, Chilcoot, I'll take 'em while yo're alive. Yuh won't haunt me then, will yuh? I don't care. My moccasins are about gone anyway."

"Gimme a chance," wailed Chilcoot. "Unlock my hands and give me a chance, Wibel. Let's fight it out. Neither of us are fit to live, but—go on, Wibel. Man to man, nothin' but bare hands. Yo're bigger than I am."

"Shut up, you fool! Hold that foot still."

"I can't move it, Wibel, it's frozen stiff."

The deputy dropped on one knee beside the tree, reached out and took hold of the moccasin string. With a move incredibly swift for a freezing man, Chilcoot kicked forward with the other foot, catching the deputy beneath his bearded chin. The kick had all the strength of a muscular leg behind it, and the deputy's head snapped back—further than a head should ever snap back—and he rolled sideways in the snow.

Chilcoot Evans laughed softly as he tried to twist his hands around to get inside his coat, but the chain of the handcuffs was too short. He stared at the limp form of the deputy, and there was panic in his red eyes as he shifted his gaze up the slim lodge-pole.

"Survival of the fittest," he muttered. "A sheath knife in my shirt and I can't get at it."

The fire was dying now. The moose bird fluttered down to the blanket, but sailed back to the bough again. A wolf's howl sounded closer.

Slowly the man began climbing the tree, slipping his handcuffed wrists ahead of him, gripping the bark with the chain.

"Survival of the fittest," he panted. "Luck decided in my favor. One had to stay here. Both murderers, but I had the judge in my favor this time."

He laughed insanely and kept climbing. Halfway he paused and almost slid back, but the chain caught on a knot and nearly broke his wrists.

He was handicapped now. His right wrist was injured, but he kept climbing. The tree was swaying. If he got high enough, perhaps it would break off and set him free.

Now he could grasp the trunk with his left hand. The top was a tangle of branches, and he was almost up there. Only a few feet more. Suddenly the tree bent over. He swung his full weight on it hoping to break it below his hands; but it swayed out, tearing his knees loose, and he swung out over the snow, the chain still around the trunk, dangling ten feet above the snow. For several moments he hung limp, swaying; and then he jerked heavily, trying to break the lodge-pole. But the pole merely played him like a fish on a line.

Hampered with his heavy clothing, the man tried desperately to draw himself back to the trunk of the tree, but his right hand was useless and his left was too weak to swing him to safety.

Twice he managed to draw up to the swaying trunk, like a man shinning himself on a horizontal bar; but the last time he dropped back limply, twisting against the chain of his handcuffs.

A breeze was blowing now; twenty below, and a breeze! The moose bird dropped down and pecked hungrily at the frozen cakes, while the coals of the fire died lower and lower. A hundred yards away two timber wolves, black as ink against the snow, came to a stop and sat on their haunches.

The Judge had made His decision.

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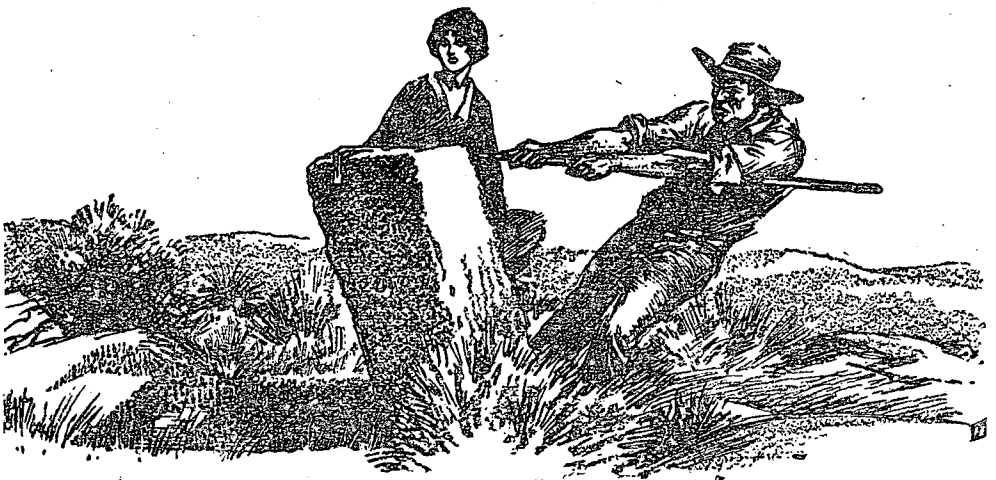

April Rides

By Clem Yore

Author of "Smiling Sid," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

LEE YANCEY is lent by the owner of the Quarter Circle to Thad Long, of the Forked Lightning, to aid in the capture of "Snake" Kinney, who has killed Yancey's father and is now harassing Long. Lee meets April Long, Thad's daughter, at a dance and gets secret instructions from her. Kinney's spies trail Lee.

"Pancake" Billie, driver of the Forked Lightning outfit, is killed by Kinney's gang and the three-thousand-dollar pay roll stolen. Lee trails the robber gang to Hawktown and overhears them discuss the affair. Snake calls for the loot. Lee climbs in the window, disarms the bandits, and has one of them carry out the bag while he covers them with his revolver. From behind a curtain Lee is clubbed by Gorilla, an apelike henchman of Kinney. The unconscious Lee is removed upstairs and put in care of Dorothea, ill-treated wife of Gorilla.

CHAPTER V.

GORILLA'S CUNNING.

WITH a throbbing, dull racking of head, a numbing and gripping of throat and breast muscles, Lee came out of his coma with a lethargic sense of his predicament. The first sight that met his view was the kindly face of the woman smiling into his eyes.

"You're all right?" she asked.

"I reckon so," he replied, "but I sure feel as if I had a real case of the bends. What happened to me?"

Then she told how she had seen him crossing the street, how she and "Gorilla" had been watching at the window of a side room; how she had attempted to rush to the hall and shout a warning to him as Gorilla made ready to descend the stairs to tell Kinney what he had seen; and how Gorilla had knocked him cold.

"I reckon that smear on your face was done by Gorilla, eh?" asked Lee.

"He struck me," she answered, a grim tone to her voice. "He struck me with his open hand. Some time he will kill me. Ugh!"

"Who is 'he?'"

"My husband! Don't you remember me? Look at me!"

Lee gazed at her; admired the soft wreck of what had once been a comely visage; saw the wide, deep, soulful eyes sunk in haggard and discolored hollows; noted the graceful proportions of the head, neck, shoulders and arms, and

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felt a quirk of memory as if, some time in the past, he had viewed that countenance before. But the fleeting recollection subsided to a vague indecision.

"No'm," he said, "I don't remember you!"

She ran to a small stand and took from it a picture of Gorilla. It was a cheap tin-type, much faded and scratched, but it showed Gorilla attired in full cowboy dress. The picture had been taken on the Saldo many years before, just after Gorilla had won a bronc-riding contest at a rodeo.

To Lee's memory came a distinct recollection of that day when Gorilla rode; of the adoration Lee had had for his ability as a rider, and the worship he had given the man, when as a mere boy, he had watched him perform. Then something else crashed into the lens of his mind's eye. It was the face of a beauteous woman, a woman who had done fine needlework for his mother, a woman who was of Spanish blood and lived down with the Mexicans in the Jungletown of Saldo. What was her name? He couldn't remember it! But, as his memory went from the mental picture, to that of the living woman at his side he realized that the worn face before his eyes was that of the once-charming beauty who had made shawls for his mother. What was her name?

"That," said Lee indicating the picture, "is Gorilla. I seen him the day that picture was taken. I recognize that beaded vest and them bone-handled guns. I also admired them Spanish spurs of hisn when I was a little shaver."

"But you don't remember me?"

"Yas'm, I does! You did fancy sewing for my mammy!"

"Yes, yes, Lee! I am Dorotea Emilio! Your mother called me Dorothy, and your father, may peace attend his murdered soul, called me Dot!"

"Now it comes back to me. Don't you remember that white burro your dad gave to me and how the old Mexican padre told me that the Saviour had ridden such a beast into Jerusalem?"

"Yes, I do! I surely do! Oh, Lee, boy, what is to become of us? Why did you come here and what evil demon made you and me cross the path of Gorilla? He's all of that! He's a beast, brute in man's form, he's steeped in crime, and without mercy—but—I love him and I am his wife!"

Lee winced as his thongs bit into his wrists. Seeing this Dorotea said, "If I were to liberate you we would both perish. Can you stand the pain a little longer?"

"Don't you worry none, ma'am. He's roped me so tight that in a little while the blood circulation will be shut off in my arms and I won't feel no pain a-tall."

"Poor child," said Dorotea. "While you lay unconscious I said my beads and asked for Mary's aid! I know something will help me to enable you to free yourself from this gang! What did you do downstairs?"

He told her all that had befallen him since he met with April at Gunbarrel; of the murder of "Pancake," of his attempt to take away the stolen pay roll, and of how he was about to escape when Gorilla knocked him senseless. Dorotea's eyes dilated in a sudden fierce flame.

"There was three thousand dollars on that table?" she asked.

"There sure was!"

"Then Gorilla will not return to this room until a portion of that loot is in his hands. The man is becoming a fiend, and signs tell me that his mind is wavering and that a great blood lust is coming to harvest in him. Several times I have heard him muttering about the way 'Snake' Kinney had treated him. I wouldn't be surprised if he were to attempt something ferocious down-

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stairs this very moment. You say that those men are unarmed?"

"All their guns was thrown out of the window!"

She cried out in agony. "What shall I do if, after he knows that these men are unarmed, he decides to carry off all that money and then destroy you?"

"Is there anything in this room I could use as a weapon?"

"No," she answered, "not even a chair!"

Suddenly, out of the hallway which led from the first to the second floor, there arose a loud argument during which Gorilla's voice came floating up in high, strident cries. The woman shook as with the ague, and her lips moved in a silent prayer.

"He's mad," she said after a while, "I wish I could hear what he is saying!"

She didn't wait long, for the voices ceased, and loud footsteps could be heard ascending the stairs. A key grated in the lock, and as Dorotea leaped away from Lee, the door was flung wide and Snake Kinney and Gorilla strode into the room.

"Get on your things," commanded Gorilla. "We're going away from here!"

"Where?"

"Go to your room and dress. Put on your pants and dress warm." Gorilla's effect on the woman was pitiful. Silently, almost cringingly, she left the room and returned in a few moments dressed in riding clothes and carrying a small bundle of apparel tied with a strap. During her absence Kinney stared without speech into Yancey's face. Gorilla sat on the bed and surveyed his prisoner with a look of profound contempt. Of a sudden, Gorilla's eyes found the tin-type, which Dorotea had neglected to take from the floor at his side.

"Who was looking at that?" Gorilla asked.

"I was," replied Dorotea.

"You lie! You was showing it to *him!* Why? Tell me, you, or I'll snap your neck like I would a quail bone!"

"I asked her to do it," said Lee. "I seen it, over *yonder.*"

Kinney and Gorilla stared into each other's eyes.

"You sure is right," said Gorilla. "Now that I look at him he's got the same face exactly. Well," he said to Lee, "why did you want to squint at my mug?"

"I seen you the day you won that saddle and five hundred riding broncs at Saldo. I remembered them Spanish spurs and them bone-handled guns! I knew you the minute I clapped an eye on your outfit."

"Now you see, don't you?" said Kinney. "You can't let this hombre romp around loose, he knows too much."

Gorilla picked up the picture and stuck it in his pocket.

"Get me a towel," he said to Dorotea. "I'm going to stop this fella's holler." The woman brought a towel. With this a gag was formed that prevented Lee from making a sound. Gorilla then unbound his feet, lifted him to a standing position and shoved him through the door. Downstairs went the three men and the woman, out of a side door, along the darkened street and into a stable. Here Kinney left them, after a whispered conversation with Gorilla, and returned to The Free For All. Gorilla saddled three ponies, assisted Lee to the saddle of one, helped Dorotea mount, and then, taking the rein of Lee's horse, rode out of the barn. As he was leaving town, Gorilla reached for the gag that was choking Lee and flung it from his face.

There, directly beside the spot he was passing, Lee saw the clump of willows in which he had hidden Jingaree.

"In them willows," he said to Gorilla, "is my bronc. Won't you let me change horses?"

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Gorilla laughed, looked at the willows, and started toward the spot exactly as Jingaree emitted a loud and joyous nicker. Ordering Dorotea to dismount and fetch Lee's horse, Gorilla turned to Lee and said, "I ain't treating you like a Christian for nothing. I s'pose you knows that, don't you?"

"I figgered you had some reason for giving me this ride."

"I have. I'm using you as buffer to make Snake Kinney come clean with me. He's been giving me a first-class, stem-winding cheating this last year, and after all I done for him. But, boy, if you wants to live you do as I tells you, and don't get the idea that there's a winning card to play agin' me. There's just one chance in a million. I'm taking it to win a bank roll and if you plays my game you may save your hide."

"I always was a gambler, lead your ace!" There was a supreme recklessness in that reply. The words and the voice tickled Gorilla so that he actually laughed.

"To-morrow I'm going to empty six .45 slugs into your body, in the presence of Snake Kinney and two of his men. After that I wants you to live, so's to help me get that bank roll I was telling you about. Snake intends to steal all the cows in this corner of the county, and I reckon he figgers on getting away without no split with me. First, he'll annihilate and salivate old man Long, and then steal his kid; then he'll mop up the rest of these white-livered cowboys, steal their cows, and start a big shove south to the railroad. Them cows will be shipped and sold in Mexico. I'm on to this cute, hog-wild hombre and intends to copper every play he makes. If you stays put, and runs according to what I aims to do, you'll live to hear the turtle doves sing another April."

April! A fear stirred in Lee's heart. He thought of the menace to the girl in the narrative Gorilla had just uttered. Snake Kinney intended to kill her father, carry off all the Forked Lightning cattle and steal the girl. Lee turned from the chill of this thought to the threat against his life.

"If you beds down six .45 slugs in my back to-morrow, how does you expect me to live long enough to be of any kinda use to you? Does you think I can digest that much hot lead?" he asked.

Dorotea now brought up Jingaree, who acted like a small child meeting its mother after a long absence. He whinnied, rubbed his muzzle against Lee's leg, gave forth small, half cries of pure delight as Lee spoke affectionately to him, and wound up by laying his head on Yancey's hip. This was too much for Dorotea.

"Can't the boy ride his own horse?" she asked. "I'll lead the other pony."

"All right," said Gorilla, "come on!"

He rode to Lee's side, reached out a long arm, circled Lee's waist with it and lifted him easily from one horse to the other. The strength exerted in that cramped and unusual position astounded Lee, but he made no sign that he considered the exhibition extraordinary. However, he took up his conversation with his captor where the intrusion of Jingaree had broken it.

"How am I to weather them six balls in my back?" he asked.

"Never mind about that," answered Gorilla. "To-morrow's plenty time for that answer. But don't make a fool outa yourself and take too many chances. Play the game and stay whole; get to running according to *your* gospel and you'll think somebody has raised hell and threw the chunk inside. I've agreed to put you out of the way in the presence of Kinney, and I gets all that bank roll that you nearly carried out of The Free For All, when I've done the job."

"Where are we going?" asked Dorotea timidly.

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"To the Pueblo of the Phantom Mesa," answered Gorilla. "You always liked that place, didn't you? Let's go!"

As his horse started after Gorilla, Lee saw Dorotea shudder and heard a low and mournful monotone as she said imaginary beads.

For more than three hours, Gorilla led Jingaree through a labyrinth of scrub timber, coming out at last on a high, barren hill overlooking broad, flat waste land. At a far corner of the plain, a huge moon-bathed rock reared its gigantic bulk into the southern sky. It appeared like some ancient citadel, or primitive house of worship, and yet it looked like a mesa, or the side of a mesa. Lee stared at it in amazement.

"There she is," announced Gorilla. "There was two hundred Puebla Injuns starved to death on that rock by the Navajos, one time. There's ghosts up there, ain't there, Dorotea? Injun ghosts!"

"What Satan's work are you up to now?" asked the woman.

"There's where I and him and you will spend many a day, old gal, and there is where I'm going to make Snake Kinney do my getting-rich. Nobody will bother us there, will they?"

"Please," said Dorotea, "turn this boy loose and let us ride away. You have enough money to settle down on a little ranch and quit this sort of life. Please let this boy go. His mother was my only friend when I was a girl. Please let him go!"

"Shut up!" cried Gorilla. "Not another yap outa you!"

The trio began the descent to the plain, and when the flat country was reached the Phantom Mesa assumed the proportions which had given it its name. Truly, as Lee stared at it, he thought it a huge mesa or plateau rising abruptly from the floor of the desert. It seemed to join to the long battalions of other mesas which led on and on into the background of the far hills. Yet, even as he looked, and as the moon swept behind a cloud, the huge rock stood out cameolike, a lone and sentinel stone surrounded by miles of gaunt, gray sand. Back came the moon, and the magic of the illusion prevailed again.

Not a word was spoken as the riders traversed the desert; not an effort was made by Gorilla to break a low single-note song that constantly hung like a grunt in his throat. But when the rock was reached he seemed to snap into life.

"You lead the way up to that first landing," he said to Dorotea. "I'm walking beside this hombre to see that his fool bronc don't dump him in case that slide is slippery."

The woman rode up a narrow incline, leading the spare pony, and after her stepped Jingaree with Gorilla walking at its side and leading his own horse. A hundred feet above the earth a giant hollow appeared off the shelf trail and into this were led the horses and tied to rings in a rock-covered wall. There were signs that horses had formerly been tethered at this spot. At one corner a tiny stream of water trickled into a rock crack. Near this lay a flat stone which Gorilla placed beneath the small waterfall, thus diverting the water to a basin beside the crack which was evidently a natural water trough. "Cute, wasn't they?" he said, smirking at Lee. "But wait till you've seen what they done on top. It's climb a ladder from now on. Does you think you can make it?"

"How much of a ladder?"

"One hundred and twenty-five feet, straight up, and if you falls you'll drop an even two hundred and twenty-five feet before you dirties a shirt. If you don't think you can do it, I'll tie you up, make the climb myself. and then rope-haul you to the top."

"Turn my hands loose, give me a little time to work 'em into shape, and I'll go up," said Lee. He had seen a

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look of mute appeal in the eyes of Dorotea and decided that come what may he would do what Gorilla wanted. After unbinding Lee, Gorilla pointed to a trail that led upward from the cleft and along this Lee stepped until it ended. At this point a rough rope and pinon-limb ladder hung knee high above the trail.

"Go on up!" ordered Gorilla. Lee grasped a slender rung and began the ascent to the top; after him came the giant outlaw. When the crest of the rock was reached, Yancey beheld an amazing scene.

A large community house, built in a circular form, met his sight; and, surrounding this, over a space of five or six acres, were scores of adobe hogans, some of which were two and three stories high. These buildings were in a fair state of preservation, and the main house or council chamber was in perfect condition. Lee's astonishment was ended by an abrupt order from his captor. "Stand over there," said Gorilla, indicating a spot some fifty feet away. Lee obeyed.

Gorilla picked a long coil of rope, dropped it across a smooth log fixed to the edge of the cliff with rawhide rope, and then shouted over the ledge, "Tie that around you and watch your head!"

"All right!" echoed up from the region below.

Gorilla, with mighty, overhand pulls drew in the rope until Dorotea's head appeared over the edge of the cliff. Then, with one hand, he swung the form of the woman a bit out, grasped her with the other hand and lifted her easily to his side.

"Come on," he said to Lee, "I'm going to put you to bed."

Shoving Yancey ahead of him, Gorilla walked into the council room, stopped to light a candle, and then motioned Lee toward a small door of thick ironwood slabs, which led off the back of the chamber. Entering this, Lee saw by the faint rays of the candle that his prison was a windowless room about eight by eight, through the top of which a small boxlike vent allowed the room its only glimpse of the outside world, and constituted its only ventilation. Gorilla, without a word, closed the door and dropped a pin through its iron hasp.

With a sickening sensation Lee stared through the small hole in the roof at a single star that twinkled down at him out of a dull turquoise sky. As the hopelessness of his position weighted down his spirit, he recalled the mute appeal he had caught in Dorotea's eyes as Gorilla had commanded him to climb the ladder. Was she, too, a part of this fiendish organization? Would she see him taken out on the morrow and destroyed, as the primitive occupants of that Pueblo formerly sacrificed their victims and their religious devotees? Then he felt a sudden warmth. It came with the memory of what his mother had been to Dorotea.

"That was a rotten suspicion of mine," mused Lee, "Dorotea is all right. If I gets mine in the morning it'll be because she couldn't do a thing for me. Anyhow, what could I have done with that cold-blooded baboon standing by my side. He could knock the corners off me with one hand and stuff my pockets with 'em with the other. Go to sleep, cowboy, you're bogged down with trouble, but you've been only knocked to your knees. When you can't see, hear, smell, taste, touch or feel, and you hears a flutter of wings and see Jacob's Ladder and the Pearly Gates, that's the time you're plumb daid and it's time to say your prayers. But keep a-shoving on and helping yourself with your hoping and you'll take these babies like Grant took Richmond. Dorotea had a lotta help and love from your mammy and she'll sure pay you all that back with a plumb compounded interest."

Lee coiled his length against an inner

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wall, folded his sheep-lined riding vest into a pillow, laid his head upon it and fell almost instantly to sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

GORILLA'S DOUBLE CROSS.

A RATTLE of the door awoke Yancey.

Dorotea entered with a tray of food and a basin of warm water. The sight of the dishes and the food caused Lee to wonder, and after greeting the woman he asked, "How come you have all this good eating and these utensils up in such a place as this?"

The shadow of Gorilla could be seen just outside, and his footsteps came regularly as he paced up and down by the door.

"This place is fully equipped with all that this gang needs to withstand a siege," she whispered, "even down to a well that was sunk through the top of the rock to the water level of the desert. There are arms and ammunition enough here to stand off an army. This is why Gorilla brought you here. If he fails in obtaining what he wants from Kinney, he intends to stay on this rock and hold what the crowd has hidden here. He doesn't know where Snake has concealed his plunder, but it's here, somewhere, and Gorilla thinks Kinney will try to come for it as soon as he starts south with the cattle of this range."

"Hi, you, Dorotea!" yelled Gorilla. "What's coming off in there?"

"I'm washing Lee's wound," she answered, and immediately set about cleansing the jagged hole in Yancey's scalp. While engaged in this action she managed to whisper to Lee: "Don't fear what he threatened to do to you. If all goes well you will not be hurt. I have his word for it, and when Gorilla tells me anything for the truth, it *is* the truth. I asked him if he intended to kill you with his gun and he laughed as he said that as far as Kinney was concerned it would look like a killing. Later, I'm sure, he'll acquaint you with his plans."

Gorilla stuck his head inside the door.

"Oh!" he said; "you're still at it, eh? Well, hustle. and come on out here, I want you to take a gun and get me some rabbits!"

"Rabbits?" screamed Dorotea. "What do you want with rabbits?"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared the gargoyle mouth that split across Gorilla's face from ear to ear. "Blood! Blood! I tells you, blood!"

"Don't, honey! Don't laugh like that! Please don't get in a frenzy now! I'll go just in a moment!"

Clearly the poor, trembling creature at Lee's side was shaken in the grip of some tremendous agony. It was evident that the attitude and words of her husband made her fear that a terrible mood was about to take possession of him.

"I wants at least six! When you're finished with that kid I'll get a shotgun for you. Go over near that big slag pile and there you'll find plenty of jacks. If you see any road runners, doves, hawks or ravens, knock them down too. It's blood I wants, and lots of it! How you feeling, Yancey?" he asked.

"All right! Bunged up about the brain parlor a bit. You must of laid agin' that club, didn't you?" replied Lee.

"Say, I didn't lean on that handle none a-tall. I could bed a club in a man's skull, if I was a mind to. But when I knowed you was in the house, and after hearing what you had to say to Kinney as I was hiding back of that blanket, I got a notion that you was worth a dern sight more to me alive than you was dead. Old good luck sent you to me. Played you plumb across the board and into my hands. The more I think about you the better I likes you. You're a life preserver, you are!"

He turned and could be heard re-

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treating toward the front of the council room.

"I'll go, now," said Dorotea, "and I'll try to question him about what he intends to do. I don't like this mood of his, Lee, and I'm afraid to cross him in the least thing. He is terrible when he is angered. You can't conceive to what awful lengths he will go. Twice he has broken my arm with a twist of his wrist. He loves me as a tiger loves a mate, and when he is cool and normal I can do anything with him; but when wild with drink or crazed with hate or anger he becomes a maniacal beast. It is at such times as these that I do not cross him in the littlest way."

"What did he mean about blood?"

"I don't know. At times I fear he is utterly insane, for he does such strange and crazy things. He wears a few owl feathers, a piece of black obsidian, and a red wool string in a small buckskin bag about his neck. He would no more come to this Pueblo without these than he would cut off an arm. Once an old Taos woman told me that the articles he hangs about his neck will ward off evil spirits. The blood of a rabbit is used for charm purposes, also."

"But he said to bring him birds, too!"

"Yes, he wants blood! Ugh! I can't understand him."

"Dorotea! You better come out of there!"

The woman bounded from the room as if a rope had pulled her away. "I'm coming," she said loudly. "I'm coming, dear!"

"There's a candle and some matches on the tray," she said as she left. Lee smiled as he heard the pin drop into the hasp and listened to the running feet of Dorotea. He ate his breakfast and enjoyed it. The cool water Dorotea had brought refreshed him, and the food gave him renewed vigor. As he sat smoking and staring about the tiny room it seemed to him that ages had passed since he had dropped out of the caboose at Four Mile shipping pens. He thought of April.

How troubled she and Thad Long would be at his absence and how useless it would be for them to try to find him!

His heart beat faster as he remembered the features of the girl's face as he had seen her last. A bold thought leaped into his mind as he recalled her stricken look as he bade her good-by. Could it be that she was interested in him? Could she care for him as he knew he was growing to care for her? The words of "Ten Penny Pete" chilled his memory like a douche of cold water: *"She's fed up on punchers, been reared with 'em and knows all about 'em and don't like 'em!"*

"Shucks," said Lee aloud, "Pete's right! She couldn't be a-liking me, no siree! Me, with a mouthful of bad grammar, owning nothing but boots, Stetson, Colts, overalls and a bronc, what have I to set a girl like her a-tingling? I'm sure nervy to think of her thataway! Nervy that's it! I've got a fighting heart, all right; but when it comes to telling her I likes her I've got a pair of cowardly legs to take me away from the battleground. I'll just lock her up in the tack room of my mind and keep her there to dream about. She's sky-high folks and I'm so low-down I'd have to use a pitchfork to comb the swampweeds off my rusty old self. Nope, she wasn't made for the likes of me, except—by jiminy, I was forgetting! Yancey, boy, you gotta make a try to get away from here; Kinney is plotting for that girl. And you've got to save her and her dad."

How long he spent in pondering on the fate Kinney was planning to deal out to Thad Long, Lee never knew. But presently he heard muffled voices and then his door opened. The room was flooded with light, for when the sun rose over the eastern hills it blazed

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fiercely into the council room. There stood Gorilla, and back of him Dorotea holding a number of rabbits and birds.

"Come on out," commanded Gorilla.

Lee walked from his prison. He was filled with the desperate thoughts that had occupied his mind since breakfast, and now as he strode toward the giant he speculated upon what chance he would have to make a snatch at one of the guns sticking in the long black sheaths at the man's hips. "That's close enough," said Gorilla as Lee walked to within twenty feet of him, "take off that vest."

"If you're going to salivate me," replied Lee, "you take it off. I don't do nothing but try to get my hands on you."

Gorilla smiled.

"Derned if you ain't got spunk," he said. "But, boy, take it off," these last words were uttered in a genial and kindly tone. Involuntarily Lee slipped his arms out of his riding vest.

"Whatcha wanting with it?" he asked.

"Bring it along," said Gorilla, moving toward the front of the room. Lee followed. Gorilla stopped among the hogans that ranged the communal house and said queerly: "Here's where I shows you a trick with rabbit's blood and forty-five shells. Throw down that vest."

Lee followed instructions, though to have saved his life he could not have told why; it must have been something that he saw in Gorilla's face, something that intrigued him or filled him with a sense of security. Dorotea, at a signal from her husband, ran to the edge of the rock and stared over the desert.

"I can't see anything," she cried after a while. Then added, "Yes, I do, horses!"

"Where?" asked Gorilla.

"Coming along our trail. Now the string is just hitting the sand alongside of Signal Rock."

"We've got plenty of time," remarked Gorilla, "it'll take them an hour to get here, even though they run all the way."

Slowly he drew one of his guns and held Lee's eyes as he pulled out the weapon. Lee felt that his last moment had come. Then he saw a smile twist the mouth of the man before him. Bang! went the heavy revolver. Its bullet kicked up a small cloud of dust beside the discarded vest. Bang! More dust! Then three more shots broke the stillness of the scene. Dorotea came running toward the spot. "Don't kill him! Don't, don't murder him before my eyes!"

Her voice died in a gasp as she saw Lee laughing.

"He's shot my vest full of holes," he cried. "What's the reason of that, hombre?"

"Pick it up and follow me," answered Gorilla.

Lee was conducted to a far corner of the rock's top. Here, on a large flat stone, in which were imbedded four thick stone posts, Gorilla compelled him to lie flat.

"This is where the Injuns beat their prisoners to death with clubs," he said. "They tied 'em to these posts and then finished 'em. Here's where you are to be finished off. Put on that vest again."

"Wait a minute,' cried Lee. "I thought you said that——"

"Put on that vest and play this game! It's the one chance of you coming out alive. If I'm willing to risk it, why shouldn't you?"

"Obey him," said Dorotea.

Lee slipped into the garment.

"Now flop face downwards," commanded Gorilla. "I'm tying your hands and legs to these posts."

With a few rapid twists Lee was snubbed, with outstretched arms and legs, upon the face of the rock. He heard Gorilla and Dorotea walk away. Raising his head, he saw them slitting the bodies of the rabbits and draining them over a stone basin. The sight sent

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a pang of fear throughout his being. He tugged at the ropes, but a master hand had tied those knots and he could not budge the thongs the fraction of an inch. "Blood," he mused, "rabbit and bird blood!" Receding footsteps were heard, after a while, and he looked in the direction of the sound. He saw Dorotea throwing the rabbits and birds from the far side of the Phantom Mesa. As she turned about she stared at him. On her face was a horrible look of fear. She walked within fifty feet of Lee but made no sign that she saw him. On she went toward the place where the ladder landing lay and here she looked over the desert.

"They are within a quarter of a mile," she cried, "and coming fast."

"Give me a sign when they have stuck away their horses," shouted Gorilla. "Holler, 'Hello, Snake!' when you see the first man come out after tying up his bronc."

Lee saw the huge form of Gorilla coming toward him. In his hands he gingerly carried the basin he and Dorotea had used to hold the blood from the birds and rabbits. He ascended the rock and set down the container, then he smiled into Lee's eyes.

"Boy," he said, "when you hear me crack down on you the first time, I wants you to give a spasm and then a hump. Then at the second crack a long shiver. After that lay still, willya!"

Lee's throat went dry. All he could think of was that the man had suddenly gone insane. Of course he'd give a spasm, and undoubtedly, unless the first shot hit his head, he would twist about in agonized muscular contortion. What did Gorilla mean? The moments sped by. It seemed a short time until Dorotea was heard to say, "Hello, Snake!" Then——

Something wet dripped over his head, rough fingers tore open the wound in his scalp, a hideous mirth sounded in his ears. His vest was lifted and a warm liquid was poured beneath it which ran down upon the rock and soaked his shirt to the skin. Then he knew! Gorilla was dousing him with blood! Rabbits' and birds' blood! A great booming rang in his ears. Merciful faintness came to his rescue. The sunlight vanished.

Recovering consciousness, Lee heard footsteps coming toward him and loud laughter ringing out from the first of the hogans. Gorilla stared down into his eyes as he climbed the sacrificial stone of the Pueblos and stood out about four feet, a gun in his hand—a gun with a cocked hammer that was held idly as it swung back and forth.

"Get it over with!"

Lee recognized the voice of Snake Kinney. He looked in the direction of the sound and beheld Kinney, Walden, Pueblo and two other men who had been with Kinney at the table in The Free For All Saloon.

"Want to say anything, Yancey?" asked Gorilla.

"'Over yonder,'" yelled Snake, "do your talking over yonder!"

"You'll never make me look like I made you turn green and yaller, last night," gibed Lee.

Zowie!

A stinging bit into Yonder Yancey's back. It was like the simultaneous puncture of a hundred needles. Lee strained at his thongs as he heard Dorotea scream. "You told me you wouldn't kill him!" she cried.

"Get her, Pueblo!" commanded Kinney, just as Gorilla's gun barked a second time. The shrieks of the woman told that she was in the hands of one of the gang.

Three times more the heavy discharge of the Colt rang through the deserted adobes. Then Gorilla cried, "This time in his head!"

"Si! Tiro de Gracia!" yelled Kinney mockingly.

"The mercy shot," translated Yonder

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Yancey. At that instant the heavy gun back of him spoke for the sixth time.

"Come," yelled Gorilla, "and hold his post mortem!"

The Kinney men, led by Snake himself, ran to the rock and stared at the becrimsoned form that lay there.

"Is that a-plenty?" asked Gorilla.

"You butcher!" said Snake, turning away. "Let's get down to cases for I've got to fly back as soon as I can."

"Have you got the jack with you?" asked Gorilla, coming down from the stone.

"Every cent," replied Kinney. "And it's in the same bag you seen last night. Watcha want done with this woman of yours?"

"Turn her loose, Pueblo," said Gorilla; then added to Dorotea: "You said prayers over his old man, now go and say a few over him. When I gets my sleep I'll bury him out in the sand."

The woman ran screaming toward Lee and reached the stone on which he lay as the last of the Bottle Dot gang vanished into a jumble of adobes which lay between the stone and the communal house.

"Mia chichito," crooned Dorotea, grasping Lee's head, *"mia pobrecito!* Mother of Christ protect him now!"

Lee for a few moments gave no sign of life. Then as Dorotea looked about and saw that the men were not in sight she set up a loud, wailing cry. "You coyotes, you human wolves, for this all of you shall hang! Is there no pity among any of you? Won't some one untie these ropes?"

After a while she mumbled a prayer and her voice mingled strangely with the muffled curses and ribald laughter which came faintly from the communal house. Hearing this, Lee moved his head, opened his eyes and said in a whisper, "Make no sound, Dorotea, for I'm not hurt! A little powder-burned from that first shot, but otherwise I'm as sound as a nut!"

"Mother of God be praised," muttered the woman. "He did not lie, did he? Gorilla did not lie!"

"No," answered Lee; "I reckon he must have pulled the lead out of his shells. As soon as you can do it, I would like this stuff he poured on my face washed away. Then he opened that cut on my head and I reckon it's bleeding afresh." Dorotea whimpered like a child. From the council room came Gorilla's raucous voice.

CHAPTER VII.

GOLD AND A PINTO BEAN.

I BURNED you that first shot, didn't I?" asked Gorilla, staring at Lee.

"I'll say you did. Have they gone?" asked Lee.

"Yes, and I pulled the ladder up after them. It's us here now until we move away. And where I goes you go, kid! That is, if you wants to get away clean."

Gorilla released the ropes that bound him and Yancey stood up. Dorotea had, after a fashion, cleansed his face and head, and was now gone after some clean clothes. With Gorilla back of him, Lee walked into the room where he had spent the night. The leering giant sat near the door.

"Over there's the gold you was trying to get away with last night," he said. "There's three thousand in it, all right! But I wants more than that and I think I've got it. I've got a hunch! Didja ever read a yarn called 'The Black Cat?'"

"You bet, and it's a whale, too," said Lee. "You mean that story of the murderer that walled up a cat with a dead woman and then in a fool fit tapped the wall back of which lay the corpse and the cat? That man oughta been treated for the simples."

"Snake Kinney was just such a fool. Listen! I don't want my old woman to hear this, for she's afraid of spooks and she don't like what I'm a-going to

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do. But it's me for a good haul and then a soft, easy, square-living life, trying to make good to her for all the grief I caused her."

"Go on, I'm one wild listener!"

"When I told Snake that I was going to stay on top of this rock until he had started the cow shove to Mexico, I thought he'd fall in a fit. He turned green. He's got a lot of coin in the last two years, and he's the banker for all this gang. Where he stacked all that dinero was a plumb secret to everybody but him. But I've always had a hunch it was on this mesa top! I don't know why, but I've always had that idea. After I got through shooting blanks at you and we was sitting in this room talking over what was going to come off, right soon Pueblo asked me if I ever found any Injun secret holes in these buildings. You oughta seen the way Snake looked at him. Then Walden spoke up, and he said that once he had helped to excavate one of these ruins and that they found all kinds of tunnels and blind holes. Kinney swung about and stared at Walden for a minute; then he laughed and said that he'd been all over this rock and that there wasn't nothing but what was built on its top or cut out of its sides. Of a sudden he changed the subject. That was just crying out loud to me. I'm going to punch around and test this dern place right, I am!"

"What does Snake intend to do and when'll he be back here?" asked Lee.

"They will start after old man Long in about three or four days, so he said, and when they strike at the Forked Lightning they'll hit about a dozen outfits at the same time. That's the plan, anyhow. They figgers fifty men to clean up Thad, and about ten each for the little fellows. When the shove is started, Snake will come here or send some one for me. I knows him. He said he would come alone. That means that he intends to kill me and take back that sack of coin over there. I'm as sure of that as I am that I'm looking at you. But if I find where his cash is stored, you and me and Dorotea will be a long ways off before he reaches this old rock."

"I thought he intended to steal Miss April Long!"

"He has promised Pueblo and Walden five hundred gold when they bring her to him alive. He's crazy about that girl and intends to force her into marriage with him. I think it's because of her that he's working this last trick, and it's just because he wants to get enough to quit for good that I figgers he aims to double cross all them as has stood back of him. If ever you seen a hombre crazy over a dame, it's Snake Kinney, and he's forty-five, if he's a day!"

Lee felt a terrific spasm of helplessness, and to evade further thought on the matter he changed the subject.

"I'm kinda silly about that bronc of mine," he said. "I wonder if it's getting feed and water."

"I let Dorotea down off this rock this morning to get them rabbits and birds, and when she came back she threw all the horses enough hay to last them three days. We keep feed enough for fifteen horses for two weeks back on that first ledge, and haul it in from the south. Your bronc's all right, but if Snake had had his way that pony would now be under him. He wanted to take it when he left, but I wouldn't let him. You'll need that horse if you play square with me, and I was thinking just thataway when I told Kinney to keep his hands off'n it."

"Thank you," said Lee, as Dorotea came with a change of clothes for him. He washed and dressed while Gorilla sat before his open door staring into every nook and cranny of the large room.

"See that big basket next to the far wall?" Gorilla said.

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"I was wondering about that," answered Lee. "Where did it come from?"

"We found seven of them in one of the best hogans. This one was the finest of the lot and I reckon it must be all of seventy years old. It was used as a hoist basket, I judge, from them rope holes on its sides, and right now it would hold seven or eight hundred pounds."

"Say, Dorotea," cried Gorilla, "fetch over that basket. I want to show it to Yancey." The woman brought the basket and set it before Lee's door. Lee examined it and saw that it was about four feet high, and three square; and that it had been closely woven of strong vegetable fibers, and these covered with a basketwork of tough, split, willow plaits. Truly that piece of craftsmanship did honor to its maker. Not only was it exceedingly stout, but it was so tightly made that one couldn't see through it and it gave the impression that even now it would hold water if its fabric were swollen by submersion in a fluid. As Gorilla peered into it something in its bottom seemed to catch his eye.

Dorotea was standing near, Lee was on the far side of the basket, when Gorilla, with a quick jerk, pulled the container to him as though he did not wish either of his companions to see what he had seen. Then he turned the basket upside down and out rolled a five-dollar gold piece. This he picked up and was staring at it when Lee laughed.

"Them old Pueblos," he said laughingly, "sure did know what coin was, didn't they?"

"Pueblos nothing!" cried Gorilla, his eyes dancing. The pulse in his temples throbbing visibly. "The date on this coin is 1874. That tells me something. Snake Kinney used that basket to hoist a lot of his plunder up here, and this money got wedged in between the loose strands of the inside weave! That loot of his is up here, sure!"

Thoroughly agitated, his hands working spasmodically, his eyes popping, Gorilla seemed the very incarnation of a man demented. Dorotea watched him like a hawk. Her face blanched, and her attention was divided between her husband and Lee Yancey, who was standing in the door, edging forward toward the spot where Gorilla was standing.

Then, suddenly, and with unbelievable swiftness, Gorilla dived head first into the basket. His hips, at the position he now assumed, were level with the top rim of the basket, and his guns stood out in such a manner that either of them could be whipped from its holster with ease.

Lee saw this and started forward.

"Gorilla!" screamed Dorotea in alarm, as she threw herself directly in Lee's path.

The giant scrambled out of the basket just as Lee was trying to tear Dorotea's hands from his arms.

"Huh!" said Gorilla. "Tried to get me, eh! Tried to pull my guns when I was headdown in that basket, eh? Don't know when you're well off, eh? Well, for a thankless, low-down, sneaking, man-dog, you rises up and slops over! Now I'll fix you so that you won't make any try again!"

Dorotea hurled Yancey into his room, and closed the door.

With her back to the thick panels she inserted the pin in the hasp as she said to Gorilla, "Let him alone, dear, he was only trying to do what any one would have attempted. You can't blame him for that. But I was afraid he might hurt you. That's why I shouted and got in his way."

"I reckon, old gal," smiled Gorilla, "that you love me, after all. I gotta thank you for what you did, and I reckon from this on I won't be suspicioning you so much. But, you knows,

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don't you, that if this kid gets away from us, with all that he knows, that it's the backyard of some jail, a little trap-door, and a six-foot drop at the end of a piece of rope for me? I can't take a chance with him, not a chance in the world. That fool is trying all the time and will be till you knock him dead. He's like his old man thataway!"

"But I want him to live. I owe the memory of his mother just as much as I can give to her boy. Please don't do what you have made up your mind to do!" Dorotea's voice would have thrown any one off his guard.

"If I hadn't seen what you did just now I would have sworn that you was in with this kid. But, he's gotta go. He knows it was me as croaked his pappy, and he knows I've got the Forked Lightning pay roll in the same sack that Pancake was carrying when he was sloughed! I can't let him get outside and tell what he knows to the governor or to some leather-leg cavalry officer. I'd have soldiers around this place inside of twelve hours."

Dorotea had ceased to look at Gorilla, and was staring at the ancient hoist basket of the Indians.

"Can't you see I'm right, Dorotea?" asked Gorilla.

"I know," she answered. "You're right. It's his life or yours, dear. But if we could get away, if we could just run off now and leave him here locked up, you wouldn't have to stain your hands with blood once more. Think what it means if you kill him. Both the father and the son——"

Gorilla was moved. For a while he was strangely silent. Then he went to the rooms occupied by him and his wife, and returned with a huge padlock with which he locked Lee's door.

"That'll keep him there," he said, "and I'll carry the key. I ain't mistrusting you, but a woman is a woman, and maybe if I wasn't watching you all the time you'd get sentimental thinking of his mother, and turn him loose. That lock will keep you out of temptation."

Something like a cry escaped Dorotea's lips.

Gorilla walked toward the basket, stooped over it, picked out a pinto bean. This he held aloft as he said to his wife, "Here's more proof. You remember that time Snake Kinney packed in some grub here?"

"Yes," she said abstractedly, her eyes still fixed on the basket. "That was nearly a year ago."

"Well, in that grub was fifty pounds of them beans. Snake used this basket and that windlass outside to lift that grub to the top of the rock. If he didn't know that basket would carry a load would he risk grub in it? Or the other way round? If he hadn't tried that basket with the grub would he chance hoisting money and valuables in it?"

"I think you're right, dear," replied Dorotea. "That bean proves that Kinney used the basket, and the five-dollar gold piece means that——"

"It means that Snake has stacked a good big pile of plunder somewhere in them outside hogans or in this big house. I intends to find out where." Gorilla turned the basket upside down and struck its sides as if to shake out any loose articles that might have been imbedded in its mesh. Then, pushing it aside, he examined the floor to see if anything more had dropped out. Finding nothing, he said, "That's all. A gold piece and a bean. But that's sure enough a-plenty for me. Now I'm going to start my look-see in real surveyor style. If you want me I'll be out in the hogans at the far end."

CHAPTER VIII

WHILE FATE LAUGHED!

ALL the remainder of the day Dorotea's mind was revolving a desperate plan. Her Spanish nature, her sudden fearlessness for her husband—

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something had changed her from a frightened, cowed creature into an alert, crafty, dangerous woman. A knife on the table in her room strangely attracted her, and she had gone over the possibility of slaying Gorilla as he slept, and escaping with Lee on the horses. But each time intuition told her that unless her knife dealt instant death, her own death would follow the next moment. She gave up the idea of the knife.

Many times the double-locked door of the arms and ammunition room challenged her attention, and once it occurred to her to heat a piece of iron and burn away the wood of the door from the bolts that held its lock; but the probability of Gorilla's return from his treasure search before her task was accomplished caused her to put the idea aside as futile.

But the basket——

With a woman's intuition she realized that in that handiwork of the Pueblos lay her only hope for success.

As she was cooking supper, Gorilla came in.

"I ain't located it," he said, "but I'm sure a-trying. I've gone over a third of them hogans already and to-morrow I'll do the rest, for the ones nearest this big house ain't in such a caved-in shape. I can work faster. But in two places I've found where he's been at work. I thought I had it one time; but when I dug down I learned that what had been a plant had been changed. You ain't paid no attention to Yancey to-day has you?"

She stared at him, her old fear suddenly returning. "What makes you say that?" she asked.

"Because," he said slowly and grimly, "when I left this morning, I drew my boots over all them footprints in the dirt before his door. When I come in a minute ago, I saw that no fresh tracks had been made there. I reckon it's the wolf in me, honey. A hunted man, you know, is like a hunted animal, he always has one eye on everything and everybody."

With trembling hands Dorotea served the meal, and in silence the two ate. Gorilla scarcely lifted his eyes from his plate during that supper. As he gulped the last of his coffee he said, "Here's the key to Yancey's room, take him something to eat."

"You take it," she answered. "I'm tired. Anyhow, I don't want to have you give me a beating for staying in with Lee too long, or doing something that would make you crazy mad. What I want is to get away from here. Let's put enough food and water in his room to last him a couple of weeks, ride to the railroad, take a train to California, and then write back to Thad Long and tell him where Lee is. In that way we can save ourselves without murdering this boy!"

"No," said Gorilla, "not yet. I won't leave until I've gone over every inch of this rock's top and examined every brick in these ruins. I knows there's a fortune hidden here. Go feed him! I'm not thinking you're going to outsmart me."

Joyful emotion surged over Dorotea.

A moment later she unlocked Lee's room, laid down the tray of food, and stood leaning against the frame of the door. In this position she could see the door back of which Gorilla sat.

"You did a foolish thing this morning," she said to Lee. "And because I though you hadn't a chance to escape with your life I prevented you from trying to get his gun."

"But I might have tried," answered Lee brusquely. "I don't want to get mine like a rat in a trap; and, anyhow, I've got to warn Thad Long. There'll be butchering all over these hills in a day or two. In three more days Snake Kinney will spring his trap."

"If fortune favors," said Dorotea, "in three more days, or less, you and I will be leaving this place."

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"You're not joking?"

"No, Lee, I'm in deadly earnest. At last my eyes have been opened and the love I have had for Gorilla has turned to loathing. How I could have remained with him this long I do not know. Now I'm determined to try one last plan. If that fails, I shall kill him or liberate you so that you can try to destroy him. I must do this. I fear that the instant he finds Kinney's hidden loot he will turn into a raving beast and shoot you down immediately, then take me and race for the railroad. I don't know why, but that terrible thought is with me every moment."

"How do you intend to make this try for escape?"

"See that basket?"

"Yes!"

"I intend to use that!"

"How!"

Gorilla's cry rang out.

"Come here, Dorotea," he said, "quick!"

The woman locked Lee's door and ran to Gorilla. She found him staring wide-eyed at his hairy chest, and holding back his garments so that the charm, or luck piece, which he wore about his neck lay exposed. Horrifying was the fright-filled face that he lifted to hers as she came into the room.

"I've lost it," he cried, "lost it! And that means that we've got to beat it down off this rock."

"Lost what?" she asked.

"That piece of obsidian I wore in this charm. That works only with owl feathers, obsidian, and Injun-made red wool string. I couldn't stay here if I didn't have that charm hanging around my neck. They'd get me, those dead men walking around on this rock. Sometimes, even to-day, I feel them about me, but that charm keeps 'em off. They can't hurt me when I wear it, but it must be whole." His eyes protruded with fear, and his shoulders were shaking as though with a chill.

"Let's see it," she said moving forward.

Taking the token in her hand, Dorotea turned it over and saw that a buckskin thong that had held the black stone to the string had evidently been worn through by the friction. She said so to Gorilla and suggested that he search his clothes. While he was doing so, the lost stone fell to the floor. It had dropped into a fold of the cotton pants at the top of his boot.

Gorilla's joy at its recovery was like that of a child. Dorotea chided him and poked gentle fun at his superstitious fancy, yet she knew that had he not found the charm nothing could have kept him that night on top of Phantom Mesa. A thought swept into her mind. It was essential to her plot, and here was an opportunity to put it into operation.

"I know what caused that string to break," she said.

"What?"

"Wearing two belts and two guns. All that weight around your waist keeps your shirt pulling against the string that holds the luck token. You'd better carry it in your hip pocket."

"You think these guns did that?" he asked simply.

"I should think so," she said casually. "Anyhow, what's the use of wearing both guns up here."

"I need 'em both," he said. "But I'll get me a little leather bag for the lucky charm in the morning."

Shortly afterward Gorilla went to his shake-down on the floor and Dorotea to her bed. She was nearly asleep when Gorilla came to her. "Where's that key to Yancey's room," he asked.

"On the corner of the table near the water bucket," she replied sleepily. As Gorilla found the key and returned to his blankets Dorotea lay with palpitating heart thinking of the crafty state of the man's mind. She had hoped that by allowing the key to remain out of his possession one night he would forget

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about it. Far into the night she feigned sleep. But over and over she was revolving some plan that would permit her to have the key after Gorilla had left the communal house. How was she to gain possession of it? Then her brain rang with an answer. The plausibility of it struck her like a tonic and she bit her lips to keep from shrieking her frenzied exultation at the suggestion.

Gorilla walked with her to Lee's door when she brought the boy his breakfast and remained until she removed the supper dishes and set the breakfast inside the room. Then he locked the door, shoved the key in his pocket and did an unaccustomed thing. He took her in his arms and kissed her affectionately.

Something lovely stirred in her at this unusual tenderness. But the ugly frame of mind that had taken hold of her was uppermost. She clung to him a bit and said, "I suppose, if you don't come in at noon, I can take Lee's meal to him!"

"I'll be back," he replied. "But I ain't got no objections to your talking to him. It must be a dern tough job he's got in there, all dark and alone. I was thinking that last night."

He turned away and as he left she felt a wild joy leap within her. *On his hips there hung but one gun!*

Scarcely had Gorilla vanished amid the mass of adobes than Dorotea ran to Lee. "Shssh!" she whispered at his door. "Get ready to come out whenever I tell you. All is working well." A cry came from Gorilla before Lee could respond. Dorotea ran to meet her husband, who came running with a long, heavy iron, hooked at one end, in his hand.

"I found this under a lot of trash in the first hogan I entered," he said. "Do you know what this is?"

"No," she answered trembling.

"I've a hunch that it is used to lift a notched stone. Now for some place to fit it into. Come on and help!"

Together, inch by inch, they went over the walls and floor of the communal house, but the baked mud walls and the solid rock floor, covered with loose earth, afforded no opening into which the iron would fit.

"It's the hogans, then," said Gorilla. And at these they went systematically. Dorotea would take one and Gorilla another. At last Dorotea, finishing an adobe near the stone upon which Lee had been tied while Gorilla shot at him, walked to the stone and stared across it to the desert. Seeing nothing there, her eyes fell upon the base of the sacrificial rock. Here she saw a long and fresh scratch, as if some blunt instrument had scraped the foundation. Gorilla came out of the house and seeing her staring at the stone cried, "What you see?"

"Come here!" she answered. When she had pointed out her discovery, Gorilla began throwing the earth away from the base with his shovel. In a few seconds the tool grated on a smooth slab. This he uncovered, and there, at one end, filled with dirt, appeared a two-inch notch in the slab. Gorilla ran for his hooked iron, inserted it in the notch, and with a mighty pull, jerked back the slab. A pair of rough steps leading into a cavelike tunnel lay exposed to the sun.

Into this he shoved Dorotea and followed her. There were twelve steps which led down to a wide room. And in one corner of this, as he lighted a match, Gorilla saw boxes and bags of plunder.

"Here it is!" he cried. "Now, old girl, it's us for the long ride and happy hours until we die."

"Can we get away to-day?" even then the woman's heart in her craved to do what she knew to be right by this man; but at the sight of this sudden wealth, the avarice, the greed and the lust in his nature made him turn upon her fiercely.

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"Not to-day! I've got to rig up a set of panniers to pack this away in. We can't land at a railroad town with all this valuable stuff crying out loud agin' us. Then I'm going to do away with that Yancey and bury him somewhere."

That settled it. Dorotea's weak moment passed.

"I'll go in and get us something to eat," she said.

Back in her own room, with heart pounding and face the color of ashes, Dorotea made a wild search for Gorilla's gun; but he had securely hidden it, or still had it on his body. She found the extra belt and holster, but the gun was missing.

While she cooked, she put into action the suggestion that had come to her the night before. In one corner of the room was a box of nails and odds and ends. In this she fumbled with trembling finfiers, until she uncovered an old key that had caught her eye on a former visit. This she examined. And with a fierce exultation of spirit she saw that it closely resembled the key to Lee's room. She secreted it in her bosom and went on with her meal. In came Gorilla, eyes flashing, brain reeling with the stupendous extent of his find.

"We're rich," he said. "There's silver plate; ingots of gold, taken from the stage at Blue Bell last year; rolls of bills, and over fifty pounds of gold and silver coin. There must be an even hundred thousand in that stuff, easy!"

While they ate, Gorilla seemed obsessed with the idea of getting away as soon as he could. But once did he mention Lee. "If we didn't need his bronc," he said. "I'd let him stay with us a while and then turn him loose, but that wouldn't do! Nope, there's only one way out of this jam. Just one way. While you sleep to-night I'll get it over with and to-morrow afternoon we'll beat it away with the horses."

"Shall I take his dinner to him? Is there really any use if he is to die to-night?"

"Take it in!" ordered Gorilla, laughing. "I don't want him to get a hunch on what's to come off. Here's the key!"

She carried a tray from the room, and quickly returned.

Without looking at him, she gave him a key which he placed in his pocket. In a few moments he arose, walked to Lee's door, examined the lock, heard Lee eating, then ran back to the room where the loot lay strewn about.

Dorotea had seen him examine Lee's door, and saw him run from the place. Now she watched slyly as she puttered about the entrance to the communal house, but he did not appear to be on guard. After about an hour she went to Lee's door and whispered: "He's found the cache of Snake Kinney and he's looking at it now. Be ready the moment I open this door. I'm going to see that he isn't watching me and as soon as I return I'll let you out."

"Where is he?"

"In a room under the rock on which he pretended to shoot you!"

"Then we can keep him in there like a rat in a trap!"

"Yes, that's exactly it. It wasn't my first plan, but I think we can make our escape that way! I'm going now!"

She ran to the spot where the opening to the treasure room lay beside the sacrificial stone, rushed down the steps and saw Gorilla piling the various articles of his find in separate heaps.

"Old pal," he yelled, "there she is! You'll never have to worry a single minute now as long as you live. Go get me them sacks in the storeroom. I'm going to tote all this loot out."

Here was a mess! Why had she intruded upon him? Well, the first break had to be made. Now was the moment. The last and only chance! With a firm step she ascended the stairs, and running to Lee's room, unlocked the door. He rushed out and was struck by her

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deathly pallor. She seemed about to fall, so he steadied her with a hand.

"What is it?" he asked.

"He is waiting for me to bring him some gunny sacks. I think he's getting ready to come out of that hole!"

"All right, let's get a weapon for me and then drop that slab in place on him!"

Involuntarily she closed Lee's door, locked it, and placed the key in her dress. She never knew why she did this, and Lee, who stood watching her, was amazed at this delay.

"Let's get going, Dorotea," he said. "A second now is worth a year. If he was to come out, then what?"

"All right," she said faintly. "Inside my room are hammers and an ax. Run there and select what weapon you want."

Too late! And yet Destiny had been kind!

"Dorotea! Say, old girl, you needn't bother about them sacks!"

The voice of Gorilla bellowed through the still air. Lee stared at his companion. Dorotea's cheeks now flamed with a sudden rush of blood.

"Get down on your hands and knees," she murmured, "and don't argue! Get down, Lee! Oh! Get down! On your hands and knees! I've thought it all out and it's our only chance! Trust me, won't you? Get down! Get down!"

Lee's head whirled, he seemed about to dart away, then the look in Dorotea's eyes held him fixed. Like one surrendering to an implacable fate, Yonder Yancey fell to his knees and placed his hands on the earthen floor. With a sudden movement Dorotea raised the hoist basket which sat upside down, where Gorilla had left it, and placed it over Lee's head. It concealed him perfectly.

"Make no noise," she whispered, "but do exactly as you would do if I were not with you. Keep still, trust me, and we will be shown a way!"

At that moment Gorilla's footsteps could be heard approaching.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

SILVER STAR

A PICTURESQUE figure of the Wyoming ranges is Silver Star, a splendid red chestnut stallion, leader of a big herd of wild horses that roam the Medicine Bow country. Silver Star is the counterpart of many wild horses of fiction and the screen in his exploits as leader of his band. At times he is seen standing on some distant rocky eminence keeping a sharp lookout for enemies, but he has never been approached, and no man has ever laid a rope on him. At the slightest scent or other indication of human presence, Silver Star will toss his fine head in the air and give forth the peculiar warning sound typical of the wild stallion. It is partly a neigh and partly a sharp whistle, and it serves as a danger signal to the other horses of the herd. Silver Star always takes good care of his followers, rounding them up in time of attack and running around the herd to urge the slow-footed members of it to make greater efforts for their safety. The severe warfare now being waged against the wild horses of the Wyoming ranges may test Silver Star's powers as a leader to the utmost before the campaign is ended, and it is even possible that the magnificent stallion will fall victim to some zealous pursuer, but the chances rather favor his continuance in his wild freedom for some time.

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Trapped Trappers

By Reginald C. Barker

Author of Grizzly Gallagher Shows His Claws," etc.

WORD had reached "Grizzly" Gallagher that Jan Raauk had four pairs of silver foxes which he was anxious to sell for the sum of five thousand dollars, cash in advance.

"Twelve hundred and fifty dollars a pair," observed Grizzly Gallagher to his old friend, Sheriff Mahoney, "is about one-half the value of the foxes. I'm half of a mind to buy them myself and start a silver fox farm. Wonder what on earth has struck Jan Raauk to offer them so cheap."

"Seems like he's got a sudden hankering to go back where he came from," explained Sheriff Mahoney. "You know Grizzly, Jan Raauk is a Lapp or a Finn or some such an outlandisher. He went into Smoking Spring Valley about five years ago and he's been there ever since, 'cept for once or twice when he came out to McCall for grub. I guess he figures that with five thousand dollars he could go home and set himself up as a sort of a little brass god."

"How did you find out that he was willing to sell out so cheap?" inquired Grizzly Gallagher, running a huge hand through his silver-tipped whiskers.

"'Ten-cent' Joe, a breed trapper, brought in word to McCall," explained the old sheriff, "and he insists that Jan Raauk wants the five thousand dollars in cash."

"Cash," repeated Grizzly Gallagher, "Five thousand dollars in cash. I swan, I most sartinly do!"

"I guess Jan Raauk is too ignorant to know that a certified check would be just as good as the cash," surmised Sheriff Mahoney. "Anyway, Ten-cent Joe claims that Jan Raauk wants the five thousand dollars safely delivered into his hands before he'll make the sale."

"Then why doesn't Jan Raauk come into McCall himself," asked Grizzly Gallagher, "instead of doing business through Ten-cent Joe?"

"You can search me!" exclaimed the sheriff. "I've told you all I know. If you want to find out anything else about

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it, you'd better go and ask the breed yourself."

"Believe I will," said Grizzly Gallagher, rising, "seems like I see a chance to make a stake."

Grizzly Gallagher found Ten-cent Joe in a ramshackle old cabin on the outskirts of the little logging settlement which overlooks the blue waters of Big Payette Lake. The breed was a man of about forty, heavy as to shoulders and black as to hair and eyes. He had received his nickname from his fondness for poker with a ten-cent ante. He was humped over a table playing solitaire when Grizzly Gallagher entered the cabin.

"What is all this I hear about Jan Raauk wanting to sell out?" asked Grizzly Gallagher.

Deliberately, Ten-cent Joe selected a card and placed it where he judged it would do the most good; then he exhaled a cloud of blue smoke ceilingward from the thin cigarette that dangled from his lips.

"W'at for you want to know?" he inquired.

"Thought maybe I might make a deal with Jan Raauk if such is the case," said Grizzly Gallagher mildly.

The breed leaned back in his chair and surveyed the old trapper through a cloud of smoke.

"I am agent for Jan Raauk," he said, "you will make the deal through me."

"Is that so?" inquired Grizzly Gallagher. "Just what do you get out of it, if I may ask?"

"Me?" Ten-cent Joe raised bushy black brows in apparent surprise. "W'y, I get ten per cent of the purchase price—five hundred dollar in cash."

"Five hundred dollars," exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher, "for doing a good turn which is not going to cost you a cent! I swan, I most sartinly do!"

"You want buy out Jan Raauk?" asked the breed. "You got five thousand dollars in cash? Ol' trapper like you got five thousand dollar?"

"Guess I could write a check that would be good for that amount," said Grizzly Gallagher.

"Bah, the check!" exclaimed Ten-cent Joe disparagingly. "Jus' one scrap of paper is the check. You get me five thousand dollars in cash. I take it to Jan Raauk. I get bill of sale and bring it back to you. Also I take my five hundred dollar commish. All very fine. Jan Raauk he go back to wherever he come from. You have fox farm. Me I have five hundred dollar commish. You bet you, no?"

"No," said Grizzly Gallagher. "Guess I'll take a trip into Smoking Spring Valley myself. If I make the deal and find that Jan Raauk promised you five hundred dollars commission, you'll get it when I return to McCall with Jan Raauk himself. Do you see?"

With a quick gesture Ten-cent Joe swept the cards together; smoothly he spoke from beneath his heavy black mustache.

"As you like, m'sieu'. But be sure and take the money with you in cash if you would buy the silver foxes from Jan Raauk, for he will not return to McCall with you. With the money in his hands he will cut across the mountains to Salmon City and take the train from there to New York. Jan Raauk is ver' sick to go back to his home across the sea."

Grizzly Gallagher arose and looked the breed straight in the eye.

"Look here," he said, "maybe you are on the square, Joe, but the thing looks kinda suspicious to me. However, I want those foxes, and I'm going in to see Jan Raauk myself. You know me, Joe and perhaps you have heard that a good many times men have tried to kill me. If such a thought has entered your head Joe, you'd better dismiss it; for I shall be on my guard against you from the time I leave McCall. I'm giving

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you fair warning to watch your step because I'm going to take you at your word and carry on my person five thousand dollars in cash."

For a moment Grizzly Gallagher stood looking down at the breed. Then he left the cabin.

For a full ten minutes Ten-cent Joe sat very quiet, then he rose and from beneath the mattress of his bunk took a .45-caliber Colt revolver. He spent half an hour cleaning and oiling the heavy weapon and thinking of Grizzly Gallagher, Jan Raauk, and the five thousand dollars in cash.

Once Grizzly Gallagher made up his mind to do anything in a certain way, it was next to impossible to dissuade him. For, while he was always ready to listen to other peoples' advice, it was seldom that he took it; preferring in the main to do his own thinking. So when the cashier of the bank protested against the folly of carrying five thousand dollars in bills across one hundred miles of lonely mountain trails, Grizzly Gallagher very positively refused to listen.

"I've got that much on deposit here, haven't I?" asked the old trapper mildly.

"You have that, Grizzly," replied the cashier, "and then some. But why in the world can't you take a certified check with you if you are bound to go to Smoking Spring Valley? It seems to me you are taking a desperate chance of being followed and murdered by Ten-cent Joe."

"I warned him to be careful," explained Grizzly. "Anyway, I don't think the breed would harm me. I did him a good turn once. Gave him a litter of fox pups a few years ago, because at that time I had no place to keep them."

"I know you did," admitted the cashier, "but just the same I wouldn't trust a breed any further than I could kick him. Five thousand dollars in cash means a good deal to a man like Ten-cent Joe."

"How about this Jan Raauk?" asked Grizzly Gallagher. "Know anything about him?"

"Only that he won't take a check for anything," said the cashier. "A few years ago he drifted into town and went to work for Huff & Hammond at the sawmill. Worked there six months and let his wages run up until he had a sizable check coming. But when he quit the mill, Old Man Huff had to come to the bank with him and draw out the money in cash. No, Jan Raauk never had any use for a check."

"Glad you told me," said Grizzly Gallagher. "Your explanation makes Ten-cent Joe's story seem all the more probable. Guess I'm safe in hitting the trail to Smoking Spring Valley in the morning."

But although Grizzly Gallagher had fully made up his mind to go to Smoking Spring Valley with the money, he judged it might be well so to inform his old friend, Sheriff Mahoney. The sheriff's comment was characteristic of the deep friendship he felt for the old man who had been a close chum of his father's.

"Grizzly," said the sheriff, "for quite a while I've had an idea that you are beginning to need a guardian. Now I know it. I can't stop you going to Smoking Spring Valley with the money, but I can go with you and see that you get back safely. And, by gum, that's just what I'm going to do! I'll leave my deputy in charge of the office and be ready to start with you in the morning."

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher. "It seems as though a man can raise quite a smoke with five thousand dollars in cash. Mighty obliged to you, Jim. Be sure that you don't oversleep, for I'm going to make an early start." Heaving himself to his feet, the gigantic old trapper left the office. Halfway across the street he paused and looked

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back and a slow smile irradiated his whiskery face as he muttered:

"Thinks I can't take care of myself, does he? Imagines that I'm getting old. I swan, I most sartinly do!"

At dawn Sheriff Mahoney strode down to the end of the dock which reached out into the lake. Only the night before he had seen Grizzly Gallagher loading supplies into the boat which had been moored to the end of the pier. To Sheriff Mahoney's chagrin and surprise the boat was gone. Grizzly Gallagher had stolen a march upon his old friend some time during the night.

For a moment the sheriff stood looking across the quiet waters of Big Payette Lake, then in colorful language he addressed the sun that was beginning to peep over the pine-clad hills.

"Of all the mule-minded, whiskery-faced, stubborn old he-goats," remarked Sheriff Mahoney, "Grizzly Gallagher is the worst I ever saw." Then as a sudden thought struck him, the sheriff hurried through the still sleeping town to the cabin of Ten-cent Joe.

Finding that repeated knockings brought no reply, Sheriff Mahoney shoved the door open and entered.

Ten-cent Joe was gone and apparently his bunk had not been slept in that night.

Sheriff Mahoney's face was grim with purpose as he returned to his office where his deputy was kindling a fire in the stove.

"Mac," said the sheriff, "you kinda look out for things till I get back. I'm going to follow Grizzly Gallagher and see that he comes to no harm. He's loose in the woods with five thousand dollars in cash on his person and Ten-cent Joe, the breed, seems to be on his trail."

As Sheriff Mahoney left the lower end of Big Payette Lake in his launch, Grizzly Gallagher was leaving the upper end. He was mounted on a pinto horse, and driving ahead of him a laden pack animal. During the summer months he kept the horses in pasture on a homestead he had taken up near the upper end of the lake.

At noon Grizzly Gallagher made camp beneath a huge fir near the head of Flying Squirrel Creek. Over a fire he boiled coffee and cooked bacon, while the horses grazed at a little distance away.

After he had eaten, Grizzly Gallagher leaned back against a tree and gazed up at the blue sky, dimly seen between the interlacing branches of the pines and firs, and over him crept the peace which comes to the mountains when autumn stands hesitating on the edge of winter. So quiet was it that the old woodsman could plainly hear the sound of a hammerheaded grub boring into the rough bark behind his head. Now and again there came the tinkle of the pack horse's bell.

Sitting there alone in the woods he loved so well, Grizzly Gallagher had time to give more thought to the deal he expected to make with Jan Raauk, the strange man who had come from none knew where and gone to dwell alone for nearly five years among the mystic peaks that surrounded Smoking Spring Valley.

Grizzly Gallagher himself had never met Jan Raauk, but from what he had heard he judged that the man must be a strange character indeed.

That there were silver foxes in Smoking Spring Valley, Grizzly Gallagher had long known; but the place was so far removed from the beaten trails, and Grizzly Gallagher was getting so old, that he had not been in there for years. In fact, even though he had made up his mind to purchase the silver foxes from Jan Raauk, it was not with the intention of carrying on a fox farm in Smoking Spring Valley. Once Grizzly Gallagher had secured the foxes he intended to transport them to his homestead at the upper end of Big

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Payette Lake. That was his reason for bringing along an extra horse.

In the first flush of surprise at hearing of the opportunity to secure four pairs of silver foxes at about one-half their full value, Grizzly Gallagher's main thought had been to reach Jan Raauk as soon as possible and consummate the deal. But now that he had leisure to give due consideration to the matter, it struck him as being very peculiar that Jan Raauk should have offered to sell his foxes for a sum that was so far beneath their real value. Still, five thousand dollars in cash was certainly a good deal of money.

From an inner pocket of the sheepskin-lined coat he wore when riding through the mountains in cool weather, Grizzly Gallagher took a well-worn bill fold. Opening it, he extracted a wad of yellow-backed bills. Mechanically he counted them. There were fifty, each of a denomination of one hundred dollars. Grizzly Gallagher replaced them carefully in his wallet, and slipped the wallet back into his pocket. Then, after replacing his cooking utensils in his pack, he stood for a moment looking down at the ashes of his tiny fire.

"Five thousand dollars in cash," he muttered into his great silver-tipped beard. "A lot of money to be packing around. Seems to me that if I were Jan Raauk I'd much rather have had a check. But then everybody can't see things alike." He paused in his ruminations and looked earnestly at the pack horse, who had raised his head and with ears pricked forward was gazing at a bunch of brush some fifty feet from where he stood.

As Grizzly Gallagher followed the animal's gaze, his hand dropped to the butt of his holstered revolver, for the bush was waving slowly to and fro.

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher, "I most sartinly do! I wonder why a bush should move when there's not a speck of wind."

He strode to the vine maple, then he stooped over and examined the ground beneath it. In the soft soil were the prints of a pair of moccasins such as Ten-cent Joe sometimes wore.

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher softly, "I most sartinly do!"

Yet although the finding of the footprints had rather surprised Grizzly Gallagher, he was glad he had discovered that he was being followed. For Grizzly Gallagher's confidence in his own woodcraft was such that he deemed it impossible for any one to ambush him now that he was on his guard. In fact, it was through that very woodcraft that he had discovered the footprints; for had he not known that the action of his horse indicated that danger was near, he might have gone unheeding on his way. As it was, his senses were doubly alert as he rode up the trail.

But if Ten-cent Joe was following Grizzly Gallagher, the old trapper failed to discover it, as day after day he rode up the canyons and along the tops of the ridges that slowly climbed to a timberless summit from which Grizzly Gallagher could look down at Smoking Spring Valley.

The valley had obtained its name from the fact that it contained several springs of very hot water, the vapor from which condensed into clouds of white steam on encountering the stratum of icy air which lay a hundred feet or so above the bottom of the valley. From where Grizzly Gallagher stood on the divide these scattered masses of white steam looked like great wads of cotton batting suspended between heaven and earth. Among them, but not of them, a tenuous spiral of blue wood smoke rose from the sod roof of Jan Raauk's cabin in Smoking Spring Valley.

"A corner of God's garden, if ever there was one," murmured Grizzly Gallagher as he let the horses pick their own way down the side of the moun-

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tain. "But it is not just the place I'd choose in which to live alone."

In an hour Grizzly Gallagher had dropped beneath the steam clouds, in another half hour he had reached the floor of the valley, upon which flourished a thick growth of coarse green bunch grass from which the horses kept snatching an occasional bite as Grizzly Gallagher urged them onward. Soon the old trapper struck an ax-blazed trail which led straight to the cabin of Jan Raauk.

Fifty yards from the door Grizzly Gallagher stopped and shouted.

"Hello, the house!"

The door of the cabin opened and a man came out—a pale-haired man of stocky build. He was clad in a buckskin shirt and trousers, and wore a cap made from the gray fur of the hoary marmots that dwelt among the rocky slopes which walled Smoking Spring Valley. In one hand he held a rifle.

"Hello," he greeted. "Vere you came from? Vhat you vant?"

Dismounting, Grizzly Gallagher strode forward, mentioning his name and offered his hand. To his surprise it was crushed in a grip stronger than his own.

"You come in the house and drink coffee," said Jan Raauk, "then ve talk pusiness. But first I vill help you turn loose your horses."

Over his coffee and wild goat steak Grizzly Gallagher listened as Jan Raauk told how he had caught the silver foxes intending to start a fur farm, only at last to succumb to the intense loneliness of Smoking Spring Valley.

"Once I think I could live here forever," said Jan Raauk, "but I could not stand it. I must go home, back to the girl I have left behind. That is vhy I vill sell out the four pair of silver foxes for five t'ousand dollars in cash."

"I have it with me," said Grizzly Gallagher, "but if we make the deal, Ten-cent Joe said that you promised him five hundred dollars commission."

As Grizzly Gallagher mentioned the breed's name, it seemed to him that the shadow of a great fear shone for a moment in the pale-blue eyes of Jan Raauk. It died, as the old trapper mentioned that he had left Ten-cent Joe in McCall. So obvious was the relief of Jan Raauk, that Gallagher decided to refrain from mentioning that he believed Ten-cent Joe to be even then somewhere in the vicinity of Smoking Spring Valley.

After they had eaten, Raauk took Gallagher to see the foxes in their pens. They were all that the old trapper could wish. And Grizzly Gallagher knew furs.

By the light of a wick flaring in a pan of bear grease the deal was consummated, and into the calloused hands of Jan Raauk the old trapper counted forty-five one-hundred-dollar bills.

"I'll pay Ten-cent Joe his commission," said Grizzly Gallagher, "when I return to McCall."

Again that look of fear showed in the eyes of Jan Raauk as uneasily he glanced toward the door.

"I vish you vould accompany me to Salmon City," he said to Grizzly Gallagher. "I'm afraid to carry so much money in the hills alone."

"Then why in the devil didn't you take a check?" asked the old trapper. "I cannot possibly go with you. I want to get those foxes out of here before snow flies."

"Once," explained Jan Raauk, "I vork two-three year for a man. He give me bad check. No, I take no more checks. I like cash."

"Well, it's up to you to get it safely across the mountains," said Grizzly Gallagher. "In the morning I start back."

"You vill stay vith me to-night," begged Jan Raauk. "I am afraid."

"Of what?" asked the old trapper. "Are you afraid of Ten-cent Joe?"

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"If he knew I had all that money here," said Jan Raauk, "he vould follow me and kill me."

"Rubbish," exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher. "If the breed had intended to take the money, he would have waylaid me; for he knew I left McCall with five thousand dollars in cash."

But nothing that Grizzly Gallagher said could convince Jan Raauk that his life was not in danger, and so at last the old trapper consented to accompany him part of the way to Salmon City. For hours that night Grizzly Gallagher lay sleepless wondering what Jan Raauk had done that he should be filled with fear of Ten-cent Joe. Toward morning Grizzly Gallagher fell asleep. He was awakened suddenly by a yell from Raauk.

As Grizzly sat up in his bunk he was amazed to see that it was morning; and he was still further amazed to see Sheriff Mahoney and Ten-cent Joe standing in the open doorway. In the breed's hand was a .45-caliber Colt revolver with which he was menacing Raauk.

"You were pretty smart," said the breed to Jan Raauk, "but not too smart for Ten-cent Joe." He turned to Sheriff Mahoney.

"Arrest that man," he demanded, "for stealing one pair silvaire fox from the fox pen of Ten-cent Joe five year ago."

"This Jan Raauk," explained the breed, "he no trapper. He steal my pair of silvaire fox. Raise all the rest. Five year I wait for revenge. You take this Jan Raauk to McCall, put him in prison. I sell my four pair silvaire fox to M'sieu' Grizzly Gallagher for five t'ousand dollar in cash."

"You lie!" yelled Jan Raauk. Before any one could stop him his hand flew to his belt and a knife hissed through the air to meet a .45 leaden slug from Sheriff Mahoney's Colt. It took the three of them to subdue the enraged fur thief.

"I guessed that Jan Raauk never caught the silver foxes," said Grizzly Gallagher, when at last Raauk lay trussed and handcuffed on the floor. "From what he said, I knew that he was entirely ignorant of trapping."

"Just the same," said the sheriff, "it's going to be a hard matter for Ten-cent Joe to prove that the original pair of foxes were his property."

"No so hard, m'sieu'," asserted the breed. "Come, I show you."

In the cold, clear light of early morning they made their way to the fox pens. In one of them dwelt a pair of foxes which appeared to Grizzly Gallagher to be older than those in the other pens. Driving the animals into their boxes, Ten-cent Joe held, the trapper nodded Then with heavily gloved hands he caught the silver-furred beauties.

"Look," said the breed, "there is the brand of Ten-cent Joe."

As Grizzly Gallagher and the sheriff scrutinized the foot of the fox that Ten-cent Joe dropped the sliding doors. in confirmation of Ten-cent Joe's claim.

"Yes," said Grizzly Gallagher, "Ten-cent Joe used that brand on the fox pups I gave him. I guess he is the one who is entitled to the five thousand dollars in cash."

For the examination of the pair of foxes had disclosed the fact that from each right forefoot the first joint of the middle toe was missing.

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Chaps and Chukkers

by Joseph B. Ames

Author of "The Man from Wyoming," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

BILL CAVANAUGH recognizes his college chum, Tony Vickers, as the masked bandit of the train holdup. Cavanaugh, returning to his native Saunderstown, finds his father's outfit, the Flying V, in the possession of one Cluff, of bad reputation. Anne, daughter of Dan Warden of the Circle Y, a polo-pony ranch, is admired by Cavanaugh and secretly returns his feeling.

Tony joins Cavanaugh at the Gridiron, which he has purchased in lieu of the Flying V, and becomes attached to Trix Warden, but Anne, who also recognizes Tony, feels a certain uneasiness about the two young men despite their obvious good breeding.

Francine Stillman, a pretty, underbred, would-be fashionable girl, has pursued Cavvy relentlessly. She rides to Circle Y with Julien Debevoise, and forces herself upon the Wardens. Debevoise admires some ponies and offers to buy them, but they are reserved for Mortimer Rives, a famous player.

Cavvy is pursued by an unknown enemy, and suspects Cluff, who has urged him not to settle at Saunderstown. Tony Vickers appears unalarmed by the deputies who are constantly on his trail in connection with the holdup.

Rives arrives at Circle Y, recognizes Cavanaugh as an expert polo player, and asks the latter to replace him at the coming match: Willowbrook versus Granby. Cavvy reluctantly agrees, as affairs at the ranch demand his attention.

Tony is to convey the Rives' ponies East. Francine Stillman, also realizing that Tony was the bandit, forces him by threat of exposure to promise to remove the Rives' ponies before the polo game, in which Debevoise plays for Granby.

Anne, hoping to save Trix from disillusionment, asks Cavanaugh about Tony. Cavanaugh is uncommunicative, and a coolness develops between the two. Leaving for the East, Cavanaugh finds proofs of Cluff's forgeries and learns that the authorities are hot on Tony's trail.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WILLOWBROOK.

THE low, broad stands flanking the polo field of the Willowbrook Club were slowly filling with a brilliant throng. Singly, in pairs, or small groups, they strolled from the parked motors or the clubhouse where they had been lunching, to their various sections, chatting gayly, pausing to greet acquaintances already seated, waving at others at a distance. Women predominated, and their delicate, pale frocks, accentuated here and there by a note of strident color or the more severe sport clothes, seemed from a distance like a bed of flowers perfectly set off by the rich green of the picturesque, great trees massed about the perfect turf.

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Much of the talk was of dances, dinners and other social gayeties; comparatively little of the forthcoming match. Now and again polo caught their interest for a space, but this was chiefly speculation as to the ultimate outcome of the tournament which would be decided two days hence by the crucial game between Willowbrook and Granby. The former team had already won its final preliminary. To-day Granby was playing the Ralston crowd and there was no shadow of a doubt as to the outcome.

"As far as that goes we might as well have stayed at home or played golf or tennis," remarked Aline Moncure, whose pale-green frock admirably set off her delicate blond beauty. "Ralston hasn't a ghost of a show."

Jean Fahnstock regarded her with amused tolerance. She was one of those who wore sport clothes of a severely masculine cut, a stiff linen collar and stock. Her sleek brown hair was shingled, and when she was sitting, a stranger observing her from the rear would have some difficulty in determining her sex. Yet, for all that, she carried about her a very definite atmosphere of femininity.

"Why didn't you stay home then?" she asked banteringly.

The blond Aline made a little face. "Because I knew everybody else would be here."

"And having a new frock you couldn't resist the opportunity of displaying it," added Miss Fahnstock with swift intuition. "But why the wrap, too? It's simply sizzling."

Miss Moncure regarded the confection of crêpe de Chine she carried on her arm with naïve appreciation and moved the jade buckle into further prominence.

"Celeste has done a really decent job at last," she remarked, ignoring the comments of Jean Fahnstock, who was, however, one of her closest friends. "I hope it will cool off later. It's awfully smart, you know. For the matter of that, why the collar and stock? You must be roasting, dear. Oh, Tony! Come and protect me from Jean. She's making fun of my new frock. Don't you think it's lovely?"

Vickers, arrayed crisply in the latest thing in riding clothes, strolled up and leaned against the rail. "Ripping!" he approved. "You look like a nymph or one of those Lorelei ladies that came out of the water to charm men, Aline. Jean, of course, is simply jealous."

"Shucks!" amiably retorted Miss Fahnstock. She had lighted a cigarette and was smoking expertly. "You know perfectly well, Tony, I wouldn't doll up in that sort of thing if somebody gave me a free pass to Worth or Callot."

Tony regarded her with cool appraisal. "I think you'd look rather well in it, Jean. I mean, at least, in something soft and silky and feminine."

Jean waved her cigarette. "Don't be an idiot, Tony—at least, no more than you can help," she requested. "I wear what I like, what is comfortable, and what suits me, regardless of the fashion. Instead of talking about clothes which you don't in the least understand, tell us who's going to win the game day after to-morrow."

"So you could bet on it and make a million?" countered Vickers, smiling.

"I never bet on polo, and you know it," retorted Miss Fahnstock. "We're all rooting for Willowbrook and Mortimer Rives, of course. Thanks to you, he has a perfect string of ponies."

"No thanks to me at all," said Tony, lighting a cigarette. "I simply brought them on from the West and was well paid for doing it."

"Well paid! You—Tony!" exclaimed Aline Moncure. "Surely that wasn't what influenced you?"

"Possibly not. I was there when the man who was to take charge of them broke his leg. There wasn't anything

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else for me to do. Besides, it wasn't half bad, really. I hadn't a thing to do but look them over a couple of times a day and arrange for bringing them from New York to Willowbrook. As for the pay, Warden insisted on that and I couldn't get out of it."

"It must have been frightfully tedious," murmured Aline. "Did you have to ride in a box car and—— Oh! There are the Wardens down in 'G.' They're charming, aren't they, especially the oldest one?"

"I should think you'd prefer Trix?" said Jean Fahnstock wickedly. "She makes a much better foil."

Miss Moncure flushed faintly. "I don't see why you say that, Jean. We're not in the least alike—are we, Tony?"

For an instant Vickers did not answer. In the stand next the Wardens, perched alone on the topmost row, he had suddenly perceived Francine Stillman. As their glances met she gave a slight but imperative gesture for him to approach.

"Alike?" repeated Tony vaguely. "You mean you and Anne Warden? Not especially, I should say. You're the same type, that's all. Do you mind holding a seat here for me? I'll be back in a minute."

Without waiting for a reply he left them and walked along the front of the stand until he reached the section he sought. He mounted to where Francine Stillman was sitting and dropped down beside her.

"Your expression isn't awfully flattering," she murmured.

"Why should it be?" he retorted curtly. "I don't find it agreeable to be summoned peremptorily from my friends in this way."

She regarded him steadily from under her long lashes. "And yet you came," she remarked, a touch of malicious triumph in her eyes. "I wonder what those friends of yours would say if they knew the truth?"

"That's quite beside the question," rejoined Vickers impatiently. "They're not likely to know."

"You mean you've arranged everything beyond the possibility of a hitch?"

"Exactly that."

"You've been out to Tolman's farm, then, and looked the road over so that you can make it easily in the dark?"

"Naturally!" Vickers' tone was caustic. "You don't suppose I'd slip up on such a detail as that. I'm not altogether a fool."

Miss Stillman drew out her case, extracted a cigarette and turned to him to light it for her. Tony did even this grudgingly, declined to smoke and was about to rise.

"Just a moment," said Francine. "I merely wanted you to know that Tolman has a telephone," she informed him significantly. "As soon as the five ponies are in his charge he'll ring me up. If they're *not* at the farm by daybreak he has orders to let me know.

Tony's lips parted in a sardonic smile. "Still doubtful?" he murmured. "I'm afraid you'd never make a really good gang leader, Frankie. You'd nag everybody until they fairly blew up and spilled the beans. You don't give any one credit for a grain of sense except yourself. Of course you're working for your friend, Debevoise, but all the same you——"

"How do you know that?" she cut in sharply.

Tony sighed wearily. "Because I've eyes in my head and, as I've been forced to remind you more than once before, a trifle of common sense. Either he's paying you to get these ponies out of the way or else you've put up a lot of money on the Granby team. It doesn't much matter. I've already told you several times that everything has been arranged, but I'll repeat it again. Barring a flood or earthquake, or something quite as unlikely, your friend Tolman will have his five Circle Y ponies safe

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in his stables to-morrow night, or rather early the next morning. You're likely to hear from him between one and two o'clock. That's all, I think."

The girl's eyes shot angry sparks and her lips parted for a swift retort, but Vickers gave her no chance to utter it. Knowing well that she dared not call after him, he turned away abruptly and left the stand. Just outside the section he paused to light a cigarette and as he raised his eyes he saw Trix Warden coming toward him through the thickening throng.

His first impulse was to go to meet her; then he hesitated. The Wardens and himself were fellow guests at "Morven," Mortimer Rives' beautiful country house about a mile from the club. Aware of Anne's prejudice against him, Tony would much rather have stayed at the club, but the invitation had been given in such a fashion that to refuse would have been almost an affront. The result had surpassed even his pessimistic anticipations. Anne, he told himself ruefully, swiftly succeeded in making the situation next to impossible.

Outwardly polite and even smiling when others were about, her inner self appeared to Tony as chill as ice, as solid and impenetrable as a stone wall. Always she interposed between himself and Beatrix. Scarcely once had she allowed them to meet alone, and in her presence the old pleasant, intimate conversation was simply impossible.

Tony's inability to palliate or explain made the situation the more difficult and disagreeable. He had taken to breakfasting early and lunching at the club; at dinner there were usually other guests. But this did not help much and whenever he did encounter Trix he felt humiliated and ashamed.

She paused before him now, radiant with youth and charm and good looks. Tony had never seen her appear more lovely and yet, in the same instant, his perception sharpened by the depth and sincerity of his feelings, he realized that there was a touch of something unmirthful underlying her attractive smile.

"Where on earth have you been all day?" she demanded with breezy frankness. "I haven't set eyes on you since we played bridge last night."

Tony regarded her wistfully. "Your sister is well enough pleased with that, I fancy," he said with a touch of bitterness.

"Oh, Annie!" exclaimed the girl impatiently. "I can't imagine what's got into her. She tells me nothing definite, but I know that all of a sudden she has acquired a simply deadly prejudice against you. Sometimes I wonder if that hateful Stillman girl could have told her lies about you."

"I hardly think so," said Tony. "There'd be no point in that, and Anne isn't the sort to listen to a person like Miss Stillman." He hesitated an instant. "Suppose it shouldn't be—prejudice?" he asked, a faint touch of seriousness under his bantering tone.

Trix stared at him, and then tossed her head. "Don't be silly, Tony," she begged. "I form my own opinions. Things other people say don't alter them a scrap. I know you. Whatever's got into Anne's head can't be the result of anything but prejudice."

She spoke bravely and confidently enough, but Tony's keen sensibilities pierced her surface armor and perceived in those young dark eyes something that made him wince. In that moment he would have given anything on earth for the ability to live over again the past two months. He tried to say something that would momentarily reassure her and banish that puzzled, trouble question from her eyes. But somehow the right words failed him. There was nothing left save to end on that light, careless note which had marked the brief encounter.

"A lot of people are coming to dinner to-night," he said, without looking at

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her. "Perhaps we can manage to sit together. Bill will be there, you know."

"Bill! Oh, of course. I—I'd forgotten he was due this afternoon. Isn't that stupid of me? It'll be so nice to see him again. Couldn't we——"

She broke off abruptly and failed to answer Tony's inquiring glance. She had been on the point of suggesting that they find two seats somewhere away from Anne and view the game together, but she caught herself in time. Watching him as he presently moved away from her, she was thankful that she had not yielded to the impulse. With no evidence of emotion she saw him pass along the front of the stand, exchanging greetings and salutations with various acquaintances. But when he turned in at a certain section and dropped into a seat between Jean Fahnstock and that lovely Aline Moncure, her color deepened a little and her lip quivered.

Fiercely she turned away, her head held high, struggling to regain her self-control. She had been hurt desperately, but no one must see it; no one should see it. In that moment her little veneer of worldliness and sophistication was stripped away. Abruptly she realized that actually she knew nothing—nothing! Was it conceivable that such a man as Tony Vickers had appeared to her had been merely *amusing* himself? She did not know. The possibility pierced her like a knife, but within herself she found no satisfactory answer. She would have given much to be able to escape this throng of laughing, light-hearted, pleasure-loving people and be alone, but she was not the sort to run away. Presently an acquaintance halted her and for a moment or two Trix chatted lightly and easily.

But when she moved on her mind retained not the slightest recollection of what had passed between them. Her gaze was fixed mechanically ahead. Suddenly out of the massed stands her sister's face leaped into her consciousness. She stared, eyes slightly narrowed, lips tightening. Almost, at that moment, she hated Anne.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE POLO FIELD.

AS Vickers approached the section he had left in response to Miss Stillman's summons, he was aware of a sudden cessation of conversation and guessed the cause of it. During his absence the stand had filled up, and directly back of the early comers were Jacob Van der Veer and his only daughter. Greeting them both, Tony slipped into the seat between Jean Fahnstock and Aline Moncure.

"It's nice, of course, to be such a favorite with our sex," remarked Miss Fahnstock with her usual downright frankness. "But whatever, Tony, do you see in that awful Stillman person?"

Aline Moncure caught her breath and twisted her jade necklace nervously. Old Jacob van der Veer chuckled, and his daughter moved a little forward in her seat.

"Is she so dreadful, Jean?" asked Tony in his blandest manner. "What's the matter with her?"

Miss Fahnstock sniffed. "Everything," she declared crisply. "She overdoes it all. She talks and acts and dresses like a flapper of nineteen but if she ever sees twenty-eight again it will be a miracle. Besides, she isn't quite—oh, well, you know. I shouldn't like to shatter any illusions, but——"

"Too late," sighed Vickers with exaggerated regret. "You've shattered them already. But really, you know, even in the daylight, she—— Ah! here they come."

A bunch of riders swept across the smooth turf from the direction of the stables and dressing rooms and spread over the field, limbering up and trying out their ponies. Back and forth they

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swung; turning, twisting, halting sharply, mallets swinging or uplifted, the crimson shirts of the Granby team making brilliant notes of color in the stirring picture. In the stands the interest of the casual onlooker centered on the players. Seasoned enthusiasts, however, paid even more attention to the horses.

"Debevoise is riding a Circle Y sorrel," Jean Fahnstock commented suddenly in some surprise. "I didn't know he owned any of that stock."

"He bought several from Warden this summer," returned Vickers, who had already noticed the animal in question. "They weren't fully trained, though. He must have been busy since he got back."

"This one needs a lot of attention yet," declared Jean, her critical gaze following horse and rider. "But Debevoise is rather a wonder at training ponies."

For a moment or two Tony watched with impersonal admiration the superb horsemanship of the man he had disliked from the moment of their first meeting. "He's rather a wonder at the game, too, I understand," he remarked.

"He's a fine player," admitted Miss Fahnstock with evident reluctance. "But I don't happen to like his style. He hates too much to lose."

"But everybody dislikes losing, dear," murmured Aline Moncure in her soft, languid voice. "It's only human nature."

"Possibly, but as a rule they don't show it. Debevoise is far too keen about every little point for real sportsmanship. Dan tells me he's positively ugly when he's handicapped, or a close decision goes against him."

Virginia van der Veer bent a little forward. "Isn't he a neighbor of yours this season, Aline?" she asked.

"My dear—yes! He leased that dreadful Cuthberton barracks we've been trying to buy for so long, but can't get a clear title to. It's a simply awful eyesore, as you know; actually falling to pieces, but somehow it never quite does. Bruce has threatened to put a match to it, but it's so near us I'm sure we'd be suspected at once and all be put in jail."

"But how can anybody live there? It's not furnished, is it?"

"A few sticks of moldy 1880 things, I believe, and then Debevoise sent down a little more. Of course, he takes all his meals at the club. The whole place is simply a sieve, and the stables are worse. But I dare say he got it cheap."

"He must have," commented Jean Fahnstock dryly.

"You mean he's hard up?" asked Vickers.

"Hard up doesn't quite express it. He's been simply hanging on by his eyelids for the past year or more. Nobody understands how he can manage to keep from going under. He's been speculating, and from what I hear he has a perfect genius for picking the wrong thing. He bulls on a bear market and when he ought to——"

She broke off abruptly and turning around met the amused glance of the man behind her. "I'm so sorry," she said, though her twinkling eyes belied her apologetic tone. "I know how much you hate shop talk, but you've been so quiet I'd almost forgotten you were there."

Van der Veer chuckled. "I appreciate the 'almost,'" he said. "And don't in the least mind me. I find your views on finance singularly refreshing."

"Ouch!" exclaimed Miss Fahnstock with a wry face. "I dare say that was coming, though."

The other laughed and then the referee's shrill whistle drew their attention to the field.

At no time during the afternoon was there any real excitement. The Ralston team was composed of college

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youngsters who played good average polo, with an occasional brilliant performance by a long-limbed, pleasant-looking chap named Dunham, at No. 2. But as a whole they were no match for their seasoned rivals, and the score piled up steadily against them as had been expected. Not for a moment, however, did the losing team slacken its efforts; and Debevoise, who played opposite Dunham, was several times outwitted, to his evident annoyance.

"That's what I meant a little while ago," Jean Fahnstock said to Tony. "Granby's winning; can't help but take the game. And yet you saw his face then when Dunham got the ball away from him and made that clever goal. It's so contemptibly small."

"I simply love that Dunham boy," remarked Aline during the third chukker. "He's got the most adorable grin, and isn't it lovely the way he's annoying Debevoise? I shall give him a chaste salute when the game's over."

"You'll need a stepladder," observed Jean. "Also it would probably embarrass him to tears."

"Oh, dear no! Why, we're great pals. He's stopping at the house, you know, and Eleanor's actually green with jealousy. He's supposed to be her particular friend."

"In that case I should advise you to do your chaste saluting in private. If Eleanor has any doubts about her young man she's quite capable of using drastic methods such as roughing you up or sitting you down hard, all in the most casual good humor—outwardly. She's strong as a horse and has no sense of respect for her elder sister. So if you're wise—— Ah, Mr. Rives! Do come and sit with us."

Mortimer Rives approached the section, greeted the little group with his peculiar mingling of clever badinage and courtesy, and then found a seat beside Jacob van der Veer. For a few minutes he devoted himself to the three attractive young women, who treated him with the most flattering interest and attention. Then, as play was resumed, their attention was distracted; but Tony Vickers, who was not especially stirred by the progress of the game, could not help hearing bits of the conversation which went on between the two men behind him.

"I wonder if by any chance while you were out in that neighborhood," said Van der Veer presently, after a brief discussion of the merits of the Warden ponies, "you met a young man by the name of Cavanaugh?"

"Cavanaugh!" repeated Rives. "I certainly did. He's one of the finest fellows I know."

"Quite all of that," agreed Van der Veer. "I don't know when I've been so taken by a youngster. Of course, we met under very unusual circumstances——"

Briefly he related these circumstances and Tony's ears burned.

"I was greatly interested in the outcome, of course," concluded the financier. "I had two letters from Cavanaugh, but in neither did he clear up the mystery of the bandit who fooled us all. I confess I'd very much like to see him again. You see, I have a theory about the holdup which I believe would make interesting conversation between us."

Mortimer Rives laughed softly. "That won't be in the least difficult," he said. "Cavanaugh is dining with us to-night."

"Dining with you! But surely there must be some mistake. The Cavanaugh I have reference to leased a cattle ranch near Saunderstown and from what he wrote he must be busy looking after it at this very moment. His name, by the way, is Bill."

"The same, I assure you. He's coming East on—on business and has promised to stop with me at Morven. As you and Virginia are dining with us to-

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night, there's no possible reason why you shouldn't——"

Vickers heard no more. Impelled by a motive that was difficult to define, he murmured an apology, slipped past Jean Fahnstock and left the stand.

For the remainder of the chukker he followed the game from a section occupied by several men he knew. Then he slipped quietly back of the stand, and threading his way among the parked motors, paused beside a gray roadster which had been turned over to him by his host. Skillfully maneuvering it out of the mass of cars, he drove rapidly toward the deserted clubhouse, circled it, and striking at length into the main turnpike, turned in an opposite direction from Morven. Then he stepped on the accelerator and soon became a rapidly vanishing speck on the broad white ribbon of a road.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CAVANAUGH IS PUZZLED.

DISMISSING the taxi, Bill Cavanaugh surveyed for a moment or two the beautifully proportioned façade of Morven, with its stately white columns, spreading wings, and multitude of windows glowing in the slanting rays of the westering sun. Then, mounting the broad, shallow steps, he crossed a wide brick terrace and pressed the electric bell.

The door was opened almost immediately by a liveried footman.

"Mr. Rives is expecting me," said Cavvy. "My name is Cavanaugh."

"Yes, sir." The footman bowed, and took his bag. "Will you come in, sir. I'll call Mr. Meacham."

This, however, proved unnecessary, for as Cavvy followed the man into a stately hall, paneled and beamed in dark oak, a slim, middle-aged person came quickly forward and took his hat.

"Will you come into the library, sir?" he asked. "Mr. Rives is still at the club, but he left orders that in case you arrived during his absence you were to make yourself at home. He also asked me to apologize for not having sent a motor to meet you, but since he had not heard by which train you were arriving, he——"

"Of course," interrupted Cavvy. "I didn't know myself, and there were plenty of taxis at the station."

The butler led the way across the hall into a room with book-lined walls, comfortable deep chairs, and a great bank of windows opening on a garden to the south.

"Will you have tea, sir, or a whisky and soda?"

"Tea, I think," decided Cavanaugh, conscious of an empty void. "Have you any letters or telegrams for me?"

"A telegram, sir."

He handed Cavvy an envelope and left the room. Ripping this open, Cavvy read it through twice. It was a reply from Judge Cheever's housekeeper at Madison giving the judge's present address. After a moment's thought, Cavanaugh found a telephone directory and called a certain number in New York.

There was a little difficulty with the connection, but he finally got Judge Cheever himself and made an appointment with him for the following morning. He had scarcely put up the receiver before the butler and footman appeared with tea.

Having placed the tray on a small table before a luxurious sofa, the footman withdrew. Meacham, after indicating the cigars and cigarettes and a bell which would summon him at any moment, then followed.

"Class!" murmured Cavanaugh, regarding the tea equipage with some doubt. "Imagine living like this, with grown men to wait on you hand and foot! It's all in having been brought up to it, I suppose. Not so bad, though I'd rather have a good, juicy steak."

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He set vigorously to work on the dainty meal and had almost cleaned the tray when the pur of a motor and the crunch of tires on the drive drew him to a front window in time to see Dan Warden and his two daughters, preceeded by Mortimer Rives, descend from a limousine.

As he caught sight of Anne, Cavvy's face lit up and impulsively he turned and took a step or two toward the door. She looked so lovely, and he was so surprised at her unexpected appearance that for an instant he actually forgot the manner of their last meeting. But as these recollections rushed upon him, his face clouded and he drew back into the shelter of the heavy curtains of mauve brocade that draped the deep window.

"Of course he'd ask them to stay here," he reflected; "but somehow I never thought of that. It's going to be awkward — beastly awkward, I'm afraid."

He heard the door open and the sound of voices. His own name was spoken and then quite distinctly he heard Anne's voice:

"I'm awfully tired, so I think I'll go up now and take a little nap before dinner."

Cavvy's lips tightened and he left the window in time to see Trix appear in the doorway. She approached swiftly, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, and fairly flung herself upon him.

"Oh, Bill!" she cried. "It's too nice to see you again. I could almost kiss you."

A little surprised at her warmth, which he had no means of knowing was caused partly by Anne's coldness and indifference, Cavvy smiled down at her.

"Why don't you?" he asked banteringly.

"I will," she laughed, and did, touching his cheek lightly with her lips.

But as she drew away, still smiling, Cavvy was suddenly aware of something in her eyes which puzzled him. He couldn't quite define it save that there seemed to lie beneath the surface light and laughter of her flushed, lovely face, a subtle touch of grief or trouble. Then as the two men came forward to greet him, Trix turned her head a trifle, and it was visible no more.

More tea was brought and for half an hour the four talked of polo, Cavvy's trip, and various other matters. Then Trix went to dress and Warden decided to take a stroll.

"Where's Tony?" asked Cavanaugh suddenly when the others had left.

"Why, I don't know," returned Rives. "He's been at the club all day. I saw him in the stand during the game. I'll just see if he's come back."

Summoning a footman, he learned that Vickers had not yet returned. Suddenly Cavvy wondered whether this could have been the cause of that troubled, unhappy look he had surprised in Trix Warden's face. Could something have come between those two? Was it possible, perhaps, that Anne——

"Feeling fit?" Mortimer Rives' voice broke in upon his musing and for the present Cavvy abandoned the problem.

"Great," he answered promptly. "A little tired of trains, but that, of course, is nothing. How's the tournament going?"

Rives told him briefly. "Granby is showing even better than I expected," he concluded. "I'm mighty glad you're going in on Saturday. This beastly leg of mine hasn't improved with play."

"I'm awfully sorry. I wish I might have come on sooner to relieve you, but there've been some more ructions at the ranch."

"What! You don't mean that that Cluff fellow has been up to more deviltry?"

"I'm quite sure of it," replied Cavvy. "The men will know by this time. Cattle rustling, you know. But better than catching him at this," he added grimly, "is something I discovered just before

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I boarded the Limited. If it's what I think it, I've got the fellow cold."

In a few words he explained the situation as he conceived it and showed Rives the incriminating sheet of foolscap.

"I've already got in touch with Judge Cheever and made an appointment with him for to-morrow morning," Cavvy said. "It's the only chance I had; he's starting home in a day or so. I hope this isn't interfering with your plans? I'll want some practice with the team, of course—the more the better, in fact. But I'll be back before noon. Have you—er—broken the news to Hamersley and the others?"

"Oh, yes. They've planned to practice with you in the morning, but the afternoon will do as well. They're looking forward eagerly to meeting you."

Cavanaugh smiled rather ruefully. "I'll bet they are," he remarked. "I expect they're worried half to death having a total stranger pushed on them like this. Gosh! Whenever I think of it myself I get cold feet. It seems to me you're taking an awful chance."

Rives shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not fretting in the least. You see, I know you better than you do yourself. By the way, a lot of people are dining here to-night. Did you bring evening things?"

Cavvy looked dismayed. "I certainly didn't. My old ones were of such ancient vintage that I gave them away before I left the East. It never occurred to me that I'd need any out there. Good Lord! I'd better have my dinner upstairs."

"Don't be absurd," said Rives. "Why, the dinner's given for you, practically. I think we can fit you out. I usually keep several spare suits on hand, and my man is a wonder at rapid alterations. Let's go up and see what can be done."

Together they left the library and ascended the broad oak stairs to a wide hall on the second floor. On every hand were evidences of wealth coupled with perfect taste. Each picture, rug or piece of antique furniture was exactly right and there were subtle touches which combined to give an impression of homelike livableness in spite of undeniable magnificence.

Cavanaugh had been assigned a room in one of the wings and thither Rives summoned his valet and told him what he desired. After sizing Cavanaugh up carefully, the man announced that one of the dinner suits could be made to fit with some very slight alterations.

"It won't take half an hour, sir," he told Rives.

"All right, Jessup. I thought you could manage it. You've everything else necessary?"

"Yes, sir. I'll have everything here in ten minutes."

Jessup was as good as his word and when he returned Rives took his departure. "I'll be back in an hour to view the final effect," he said, smiling as he closed the door.

Amused at the thought of what the comments of Parsons and the other cowmen would be could they have viewed the proceedings, Cavanaugh submitted to the ministrations of the valet. He donned the Tuxedo, and Jessup swiftly and skillfully made notes with pins and chalk. He gathered up the garments as Cavvy removed them.

"The dress shirt and other things are on the bed, sir," he said, indicating the mahogany four-poster hung with plum-colored silk. "I won't waste time drawing your bath. This is more important. I shan't be much over half an hour, sir."

Left alone, Cavvy grinned widely. "Draw my ba-ath, eh?" he chuckled. "I'll bet he'd have a fit if he could see me in a wash tub or under the pump at the ranch. But a ba-ath by any name sounds pretty good right now."

He sought the bathroom adjoining

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and for fifteen minutes luxuriated in the tub. When Jessup returned, Cavvy was sitting in a deep chair by the window, smoking a cigarette.

Rives had certainly not exaggerated the capabilities of his valet. The altered suit not only fitted Cavanaugh as if it had been made for him, but Jessup had also produced all the accessories. The effect was so perfect that Cavvy expressed his warm approval.

"You have an excellent figure, sir, if I may say so," returned Jessup deferentially. "It's very little trouble to fit things to such shoulders as yours. If I might take the liberty of doing that tie for you, sir——"

With the same amused good humor he had felt throughout the whole unaccustomed experience, Cavanaugh submitted to the deft manipulations. Jessup had just finished when the door was flung open by Tony Vickers, who came swiftly forward with outstretched hand.

"It's great to see you, old thing," he said. "Awfully sorry I couldn't get here before, but I was—detained. How's everything? Did you—— Say! I thought you didn't have any evening things."

"I haven't. Jessup produced these with a magic wand or something. He's been dressing me up for the party."

"He's done a good job," approved Tony. "You look gorgeous. Just wait till Virgie van der Veer or Aline Moncure set eyes on you. Your work'll be cut out for you then, I'm telling you."

"Van der Veer!" repeated Cavanaugh. "Is she Jacob's daughter?"

"Sure is, and pretty as they come. About as nice, too, as——"

"Will he be here?" cut in Cavvy.

"He!" sniffed Tony. "You're hopeless, Bill. Of course, he's a nice old duck, but Virgie—— That's all, Jessup. He's quite perfect."

When the valet had withdrawn Tony lighted a cigarette and moved restlessly about the room. "Leave everything at the ranch all right?" he asked, picking up a book from the table and dropping it without glancing at the title. "Any more developments in my little—er—affair?"

"Brant popped up again. He sent those trousers on to Block and got a reply telling him who's had suits made of that cloth. Your name was on the list, of course."

Tony stared at him. "You don't mean it? Rather shabby of Block, I'll say. He won't get any more orders from me. Not so dumb of Brant, though. I'd hardly have expected that from him. What happened?"

"He seemed to know that there was a Tony at the ranch, and tackled me about him. I passed you off for a Mexican or Spaniard and said you'd taken your time a week before and drifted south."

Vickers lit another cigarette from the glowing butt and paused beside a window, his back to Cavvy.

"That would scarcely satisfy the fellow, if I've sized him up right," he remarked. "Didn't he go out to the ranch and third-degree the boys?"

"I haven't a doubt of it," rejoined Cavvy. "Fortunately I had an idea of what was coming and warned Mill Parsons. Brant won't get much out of that crowd."

"Deuced clever of you," murmured Vickers. "I expect, though, it would be wiser not to show myself in Saunderstown for a bit. Anything more of interest?"

"Why, yes," said Cavvy. "I think I've got Cluff where I want him."

Tony whirled about and regarded him inquiringly. "Got Cluff? What do you mean? What's happened?"

Cavvy told him. "I'm going in to see Cheever early to-morrow morning," he concluded. "From the little he said over the phone it looks as if Cluff had forged both names to a fake mortgage. Feel like coming with me?"

Tony hesitated, his glance slanting

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obliquely through the open window across the shadowy sweep of close-cropped lawn.

"I'd like to, a lot," he said presently, "but I don't see how I can. I'm tied up all morning. If I'd only known about it before, I might have managed to——"

"It really doesn't matter. I only thought you might be interested."

"Of course I'm interested," retorted Tony with the faintest possible touch of impatience. "It just happens—— There's the gong! We'd better go down."

He made briskly for the door and there was a puzzled expression in Cavvy's face as he followed. Though Tony had always had a somewhat high-strung temperament, Cavvy had never seen him in quite this mood before. What was the matter, he wondered. Suddenly the memory of that troubled look in Trix Warden's face flashed into his mind and again he wondered if there had been any trouble between the two.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT ODDS.

THE great dining room at Morven was gay with talk and laughter. Soft light from innumerable candles drew a subdued glitter from silver and crystal; jewels on perfect arms and satin-smooth shoulders scintillated in the steady glow which was concentrated on the long table leaving the remainder of the high-ceiled, tapestried room in dusky shadow. Stirred by a gentle breeze, waves of perfume from stock, wall flowers, honeysuckle, and mignonette swept through the long windows that opened on the garden terrace. A mass of roses in a huge silver bowl on the table added their fragrance to the rest.

Those roses were exquisite, a delicate yellow, shading to orange, almost to saffron at their petal tips. Cut less than an hour before, scores of the half-blown blossoms were gracefully arranged in the great bowl which stood directly in front of Cavanaugh. Above the masses of blooms he could see a well-shaped, blond head, and a ribbon of smooth, white forehead. That was all.

It was a rather tantalizing glimpse, but after the cool, impersonal greeting Anne Warden had given him that afternoon in the drawing-room, Cavvy wasn't sure he didn't prefer it so. He told himself that he could expect little else considering the nature of their last interview; but in spite of that, down in his heart, he had hoped for some evidence of thawing. Fortunately he kept himself well in hand and the girl's lack of warmth was met by an excellent simulation of indifference on Cavanaugh's part.

Toying now with his wineglass, he noted, not for the first time, the two sleek masculine heads that inclined with almost equal persistence toward the blond one. Handsome Larry Hamersley was evidently much taken with this girl out of the West, and Anne's neighbor on the left, one of the indecently wealthy Kincaids of St. Louis, appeared also to have entered the lists.

But whatever chagrin he may have felt, Cavanaugh allowed no trace of it to appear in his manner or expression. To outward seeming he was as gay as any of that gay company. He talked horses and polo with Virginia van der Veer, and lightly bantered the fair Aline on his left. Later in the drawing-room he found himself without embarrassment the center of a little group of girls attracted by the novelty not only of a new man, but one so distinctly different from the majority of their playmates.

Though Cavvy did not know it, he made a handsome and arresting figure; his wide shoulders, slender waist and clean-cut, deeply tanned features set off by the sharply contrasting black and white of evening wear. There was no

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trace of awkwardness about his bearing. His athletic body made physical awkwardness impossible, and he was one of those fortunates who are able to forget their clothes. Cavvy's interest in those about him was so complete, that he was quite oblivious to the fact that he was attired in the garments of formality rather than the usual boots and chaps and soft flannel shirt open at the throat.

There was a general protest when it appeared that he was not going on to the dance at the club and several of the girls tried to persuade him to change his mind. But Cavanaugh smilingly yet firmly held to his plan and finally they all trailed out to the waiting motors and drove off.

The stately house seemed oddly quiet after the departure of the gay throng. Reëntering the great hall, Rives, Warden, Van der Veer and Cavanaugh turned into the library and settled themselves in comfortable chairs to smoke.

"I confess I'm still interested in the details of that holdup," remarked Van der Veer, rolling his cigar. "In your last letter you said that no clews had turned up regarding the identity of the fellow who escaped so cleverly from the porter's closet."

Cavvy hesitated for an instant. "There hadn't," he answered, picking his tenses carefully. "One of those deputies who came on from the county seat started back for Madison, disgusted, the day before I came away. The other is still hanging about Saunderstown, but he's not making much progress that I can see."

"There were several points that struck me as peculiar," mused Van der Veer, watching a blue spiral curl upward. "I can't help thinking it strange that only two passengers in that car really lost anything—yourself and that exceedingly disagreeable person named Townsend. When I came East I made a point of inquiring about him and found that his reputation in the Street was none too good."

"Curiously enough," said Cavanaugh, "Horace Townsend is the uncle and guardian of my friend Vickers."

Van der Veer stared at him. "You don't say so! Dear me! I suppose I ought not have expressed myself so strongly."

Cavvy grinned. "You couldn't possibly express yourself as strongly as Tony does. He hates the man like poison. Just what is his reputation, if that isn't an impertinent question?"

"Sharp—infernally sharp," answered the older man. "A certain amount of sharpness is necessary in financial matters, of course, but Townsend appears to go beyond that. He's very careful not to overstep the boundary of the law, but I'm told he shaves it too close for decency. A sort of Shylock, you know, demanding his pound of flesh even if it means ruin to some poor fellow who's got into his clutches." He smiled dryly. "To tell the truth, when I learned all this it struck me as a case of poetic justice that he should have been mulcted as he was."

"Served him good an' right, I'll say," observed Warden with some feeling. "I sure do hate these leeches who stick just inside the law and get away with murder. I've been up against 'em once or twice." He turned to Cavanaugh. "Feelin' fit, Bill?" he asked. "We're all countin' on you to make a great showing in that game Saturday, you know."

Cavvy's questioning glance flashed from Rives to Van der Veer.

"It's all right," the latter reassured him. "Rives told me about it this afternoon. Warden's right; we certainly are counting on you. I wouldn't miss that match for a great deal. I'm coming early, too, to enjoy the effect of your appearance on the field. It will be amusing."

To Cavanaugh's relief the conversation did not return to the subject of the

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holdup. They talked polo and horses for an hour or more, and then Van der Veer took his departure. Warden, frankly sleepy, went to bed promptly and Rives hustled Cavvy after him as soon as he learned the hour of his appointment with Judge Cheever.

"You'll want all the sleep you can get," he said. "I'll have you waked in time and a motor ready to take you into town. It will be quicker. You'll be back for lunch, won't you?"

"Oh, yes. I should think an hour will be all I'll need with Cheever. Good night."

Within fifteen minutes Cavvy was lying luxuriously in the four-poster, staring up at the shadowy tester above him. He thought of Cheever and wondered what the morrow would bring forth. A picture of Anne Warden dancing with Kincaid or held close in the arms of that good-looking Hamersley chap flashed into his mind but he firmly thrust it from him and soon fell asleep.

Hours later two graceful figures paused beside the door of a distant bedroom.

"Good night, dear. It was a nice party, wasn't it?"

"Oh, so-so," returned Beatrix Warden with a shrug as she opened the door. "Good night."

Anne moved on, her shoulders drooping. Entering the adjoining bedroom she closed the door and dropped her wrap across a chair. For a moment she stood motionless; then crossing to her dressing table she sank into a seat before the triple mirror.

The light and sparkle and gayety she had maintained with such perfection for so many hours had vanished from her face like chalk under a wet sponge. She looked tired, pale, almost wan, and as she stared at her reflected image her lips quivered.

"Trix, too," she murmured a little bitterly.

She dropped her chin into her cupped hands. The task she had set herself to do was growing more intolerable with every passing hour, yet she could not relinquish it now. Believing as she did that Tony Vickers had been the robber on the train, she was in duty bound at any cost to keep him away from Trix. In the beginning she had hoped that there might be some explanation which would palliate the hateful business. But when Cavvy had evaded the subject, practically refusing her reassurance, that hope vanished. It was as if a door had been slammed cruelly in her face. For a moment or two she sat motionless. Then slowly she raised her head and stared at her pale reflection in the glass.

"A hag!" she said aloud, her lips twisting in a mirthless smile. "A perfect hag! I'll have to find some color somewhere to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE EMPTY BEDROOM.

IT was nearly half past twelve next day when Cavanaugh jumped out of the motor, crossed the brick terrace with rapid strides and was admitted to the great hall at Morven.

"Is Mr. Vickers about?" he asked the man.

"No, sir. He left early this morning for the club and I believe intends to lunch there. Mr. Rives is in the library, sir."

Cavvy's face fell as he crossed the hall toward the library door. Tony's indifference puzzled him. Full of his news, he had expected somehow to find his friend waiting, almost as eager to hear as Cavvy was to communicate the developments of the morning. Again he wondered whether there really was a subtle change in Vickers, or whether it was merely his own imagination.

But if Tony seemed indifferent, Mortimer Rives received him with a genuine interest and listened intently while Cav-

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anaugh told of his interview with Judge Cheever.

"He thinks the signatures to the mortgage are undoubted forgeries," he concluded. "Not only dad's, but his own. It was so long ago that he can't remember offhand witnessing anything for dad or whether he ever saw Jed Cluff. But he told me that he had at home a private record of every document he witnessed, with the date, so that will settle the matter conclusively."

"And if it's settled as you think it will be?" queried Rives.

Cavvy's eyes flashed and his lips straightened grimly. "We'll have him, then," he said harshly. "Cheever believes Cluff must have learned somehow that dad's illness was serious and so fabricated the mortgage, taking care not to register it until after dad's death. You see what a beastly thing it was, and if we can prove it he'll pay well, believe me."

"How about the notary's seal? Did Cheever give any explanation of that?"

"Oh, yes. It seems these things can be easily made. It's simply a metal punch that you squeeze together to make an impression on the paper. Cheever's going back Sunday night and I'll go with him."

Rives' face clouded. "Sunday? Oh, I'm sorry. I'd hoped you might feel like staying on a few days. That seems such a short time."

"I know," admitted Cavvy. "I hate to dash off like that, but you can see how important this business is to me."

Rives nodded. "Perfectly. I won't urge you, though I'm disappointed. To have had you for the game ought to content me. I shan't ever be able to express my gratitude for that."

"Please don't!" protested Cavvy. "Can't I make you see that the matter of gratitude is quite the other way? Don't you realize what you're doing for *me?* If only it comes out all right and I don't fall down—— You've arranged for practice this afternoon with the team?"

"At two-thirty. That will give us most of the afternoon. Lunch, by the way, has been put forward half an hour. You and I will be alone. The others are lunching at the club."

Cavanaugh glanced at the clock and rose quickly. "I'll go and freshen up, then," he said. "It's nearly that now."

The meal was soon over and shortly after two Rives and Cavanaugh reached the club stables and found the other members of the team in the dressing room. Cavvy had already met Hamersley and Bruce Moncure and was introduced to Craig Cutting. He found them all courteous and agreeable, but with just the faintest touch of reserve which it was quite possible for him to understand. After playing so long with Mortimer Rives at No. 2 it would have been scarcely natural for them not to feel dubious at the sudden and unexpected introduction of a stranger.

During the practice which followed, Cavanaugh worked well but not superlatively. He had never been able to fling himself with full enthusiasm into this sort of thing. He knew what he meant to do and what he would do when the time came, but the empty field, the dead grand stands, acted as a deterrent that he was unable to overcome. Only two ponies had been brought over from the Morven stables, both of which he found first-class, but having ridden them more than once before this was no stimulating discovery. As they finally sought the stables about five o'clock, Craig Cutting remarked rather tactlessly:

"Such a rotten shame about poor old Mort!"

"It surely is," agreed Cavvy with utter sincerity. "It's beastly hard to have a thing like that happen to him. He's such a perfect wonder when he's fit. I'd give a lot if I could only play up to his reputation."

"You will, of course," encouraged

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Hamersley. "You've got some corking shots. Naturally, Mort has the strategy of the game down to a fine point, but it would be ridiculous for him to go into this match with that wretched tendon of his. He wrenched it again, you know, in the game we played with Rivington early in the week."

Cavvy dismounted and passed his bridle to a waiting groom. "Rives wants me to play at No. 2," he said slowly, as they walked toward the dressing rooms. "Of course. if you fellows would rather I went in somewhere else, I'm only too ready to——"

"Shucks!" cut in Bruce Moncure. "Of course not. Mort's not only a peach of a player, but he's got great judgment. He's seen you work-out a good many times, he told us, and what he says goes."

Cavanaugh made no further comment, but after dressing he stepped into the car beside his host with a slight feeling of depression. He tried to pull himself around with the reflection that he could only do his best and he knew that this best would be much better than the showing he had made this afternoon. But in spite of this and of Rives' expressed encouragement, Cavvy was conscious of a little uneasy feeling which increased as the hours passed. He was not usually affected in this way, but the situation was unusual and so much depended on the result of the match that he could not help being anxious.

Conditions at Morven that evening did not tend to relax the tension. There were no guests for dinner. At the last moment Anne Warden sent word that because of a bad headache she would not appear. Vickers, who had come in about half past six, was in one of his wildest and most irresponsible moods. Almost any one else would have supposed he had been drinking, but Cavanaugh had seen him this way more than once before when in a condition of uncommon mental tension or excitement. On coming in he had asked Cavvy about his interview with Judge Cheever and had listened with apparent interest to his friend's account. But beyond a few perfunctory remarks he made no comment. He didn't give any reason for his own absence since breakfast that morning, and was plainly absorbed in his own thoughts.

During dinner, Tony was by turns brilliant and moody He sat on Trix Warden's right, but the unusual proximity seemed to afford neither of them any particular pleasure. Indeed, Beatrix, on the plea of seeing to her sister, went upstairs as soon as she had drunk her coffee.

With her departure a silence fell upon the little group gathered in the library. which was presently broken by Vickers:

"I'm simply dead," he said to Rives. "If you don't mind. I think I'll go to bed."

"Why, of course," returned his host courteously. "You must have been doing something strenuous." he added. smiling. "Usually you wear out everybody else around."

"Tennis," said Vickers vaguely. "It's been pretty hot, too." His dark, brilliant eyes met Cavvy's for a perceptible interval. "Good night, old man," he said in his crisp, staccato manner. "Don't you stay up too long. You've got a real job ahead of you to-morrow."

Cavvy took his advice which was supplemented by Rives and Dan Warden. Within half an hour he was in his room. Presently he got into bed but he did not turn off the electric lamp on the little stand beside the four-poster. He knew he ought to try to sleep, but he was curiously wide awake.

What was the matter with Tony, he wondered. Ever since his arrival yesterday he had sensed a subtle change in his friend. It was almost as if an invisible barrier had risen between Vickers and himself. There was no longer any intimacy or confidence. Indeed, he

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had seen Tony only at dinner last night, and again, almost as briefly, this evening. It was as if Vickers had deliberately avoided the man who heretofore had been his friend and intimate.

An hour passed. Cavvy took up a magazine at random, read a part of a story, and then tossed the thing on the floor beside the bed. He lit a cigarette and then impatiently crunched the glowing end into an ash tray. Like darting butterflies, his thoughts flashed swiftly here and there, returning inevitably to Vickers.

Suddenly the possibility struck him that Tony might be ill. That feverish brilliance at dinner to-night might easily have been caused by something other than the mental excitement he had suspected.

Instantly Cavanaugh slipped out of bed, thrust his feet into slippers and folded a dressing gown about him. Opening his door, he walked rapidly along the corridor to his left, turned a corner, paused beside Vickers' door and gently knocked.

There was no response. Cavvy repeated the knock and then quietly turned the knob. The door gave under his hand and he walked into the room.

"Tony!" he called in a low voice.

There was no answer. Groping through the darkness, Cavanaugh stumbled against a chair, veered toward the dressing table, and finally touched a switch which flooded the room with soft brilliance.

His first glance was toward the bed—a four-poster like his own. It had not been slept in or disturbed.

Cavvy's puzzled gaze swept the empty room and rested at length upon a heap of evening clothes flung carelessly across a chair. He regarded them intently with narrowing eyes. Then his glance shifted to a closet door standing half open.

Finally he switched off the light and regained the corridor. The halls at Morven were invariably kept lighted at night. Cavvy retraced his steps, paused before his own door and then, with sudden determination, walked on and descended the main stairs.

The library was in darkness; so, too, were the morning room and the billiard room. The massive main door opening on the brick terrace was locked and bolted. Cavvy was about to retrace his steps when, remembering something, he turned abruptly to his left and entered a short passage. At the end of this was a narrow door. He found that it yielded easily to pressure.

Thrusting it open, he stepped out on a little side porch and stood motionless for a little while, staring across the moonlit shrubbery, enjoying the cool night air. Then slowly, very slowly, he closed the door, retraced his steps and returned to bed. It was past one when he finally fell asleep and in that time he was quite certain that no footfall, however cautious, had passed his door.

To be concluded in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

COYOTE HUNTING PAYS

IN districts of the West that are infested by coyotes, many small ranchers find it more profitable to hunt these wary animals than to engage in agricultural pursuits. One farmer and his two sons in Shasta County, California, recently collected two hundred dollars in bounties from the county for killing forty coyotes as a result of three Sundays' work. Only three of the coyotes were full grown, the others being pups. The man and his two sons found their coyote hunting on Sundays more profitable than their agricultural work on weekdays.

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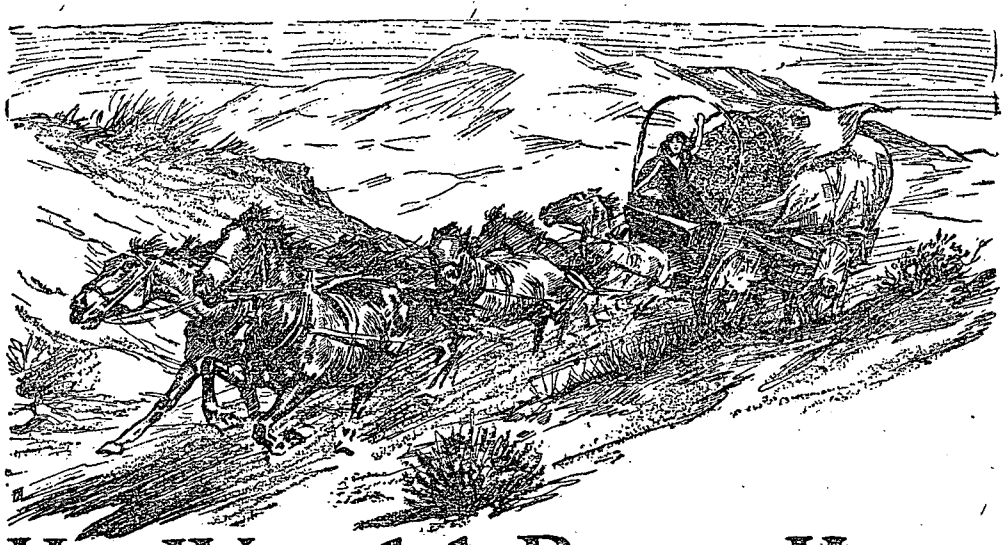

He Would Be a Hero

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "The Marsh Spook," etc.

IT was noon on rodeo day in Monte Vista. Sheriff Joe Cook sat in his office, drumming nervously on his desk with his finger tips. His ruddy face was seamed with worry. He looked hard and long at his fidgeting deputy, "Shorty" McKay, who stood on the other side of the desk, eyes down, fumbling with the Stetson hat he held in his hands. There was a long silence.

"Waal," said the sheriff, finally, with more sorrow than anger in his drawl, "ef yuh insist on puttin' pleasure before business in an emergency like this, just hop to it—go on out to the rodeo in yuhr yaller shirt an' yuhr purple necktie an' gather in the applause while yuh leaves me alone to try to gather in Manuel Perida."

"I'd like to help yuh git Manuel," interrupted Shorty, earnestly, "but, boss, I gotta take part in that International Covered Wagon race on the program this afternoon. Didn't the chamber o' commerce choose me to represent America in that race, an' what ef I never showed up, after practicin' fer weeks, an' trainin' them broncs to run like holy heck?"

"Have it yuhr own way, o' course!" cut in Sheriff Cook, grimly. "The fact that Manuel Perida runs amuck this mawnin' an' holds up the Dawson drug store an' shoots two men an' then disappears shouldn't interfere with yuh havin' yuhr fun. Waal, dang it, have it, but fust hand over that badge—yuh ain't no deputy no longer!"

Shorty's face went white, but he hesitated only the fraction of a second. He unpinned the star from his vest with clumsy, shaking fingers. He laid it, face up, on the sheriff's desk. Then he backed away as though he feared his late boss might take a swing at him.

The sheriff reached for the badge and put it in his pocket. He was evidently restraining himself with the greatest difficulty. He itched to knock some sense into Shorty, but he refrained and instead of leaping for his

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one-time assistant the sheriff contented himself with a terse remark.

"Thar is one born every minute!" said Cook significantly.

"One — one what?" stammered Shorty, not understanding.

"One fool—like Barnum said!" snapped the sheriff, scraping his feet threateningly. "Now git out before I throws yuh out!"

Shorty departed quickly, needing no second order. The minute the door slammed on him the sheriff got busy on the telephone, calling up a dozen young bloods of the town whom he could trust. To each he told substantially the same story, something like this:

"This is the sheriff talkin'. Jim, I want yuh to come right over quick. I'm gonna deputize yuh to help me look fer that crazy Manuel Perida, who held up the drug store this mawnin'. Yes—I've looked considerable already, but thar's such a big rodeo crowd in town that dodgin' is purty good. I got the roads guarded with volunteers an' I'm sure he ain't left town. Come on over quick as yuh kin—I needs help an' a whoopin' lot o' it."

The gang came, of course. They were sworn in before the justice of the peace and Sheriff Cook dispatched them in various directions; ordering them to take no chances if they met Manuel Perida, who was probably desperate enough, the sheriff thought, to do some more shooting if cornered. The sheriff said nothing of Shorty, or of Shorty's enforced resignation, except to mention, sarcastically, that Shorty was too busy in the rodeo to help hunt the criminal.

The rodeo, meanwhile, had welcomed Shorty with open arms. The International Covered Wagon race, in which Shorty was entered to represent America, was a feature event of the afternoon's program. Two huge covered wagons, each drawn by six half-wild mustangs, were to race two miles, twice around the rodeo track. Shorty, who had the American flag draped on each side of his wagon, had accumulated and trained a motley collection of horses. He had made up his mind to win. Señor Julio Quijano, who had entered an outfit to represent the Mexican Republic, also desired to win, however, and he had thought himself out a splendid plan. Instead of using half-wild broncs he had collected and drilled half a dozen of his faster cow ponies. It was sure to be a great race.

"I got two dollars an' fifteen cents up on yuh to win, Shorty," said Eddie Owens, one of the rodeo committemen, as Shorty arrived at the rodeo corrals. "an' by golly, yuh got to win! Yuh got to uphold the glory o' America, the honor o' Monte Vista, the reputation o' the sheriff's office, an' the safety o' my two dollars an' fifteen cents! Win? Why, boy—yuh just gotta win!"

"I aim to do it, Eddie," said Shorty, sadly, "but don't mention no sheriff's office to me, please."

"Huh?" asked Eddie.

"Look!" cried Shorty, and he pointed at the big covered wagon that was entering the infield. It was drawn by a six-horse hitch of sturdy cow ponies, most of them paints, but it wasn't the horses that had attracted Shorty's attention. It was the driver. Instead of Señor Julio Quijano, there was a girl on the driver's seat, handling the ribbons. A very pretty girl, costumed in the high comb and vivid shawl and short skirt of Spain.

"Gee, Julio's daughter——" began Eddie, in admiration.

"Miss Marie Quijano will drive the Republic o' Mexico's entry in the International Covered Wagon race," announced Tod Sloan, the gentleman with the megaphone, as the señorita drove her outfit around in front of the grand stand, "while Mister Shorty McKay will drive the American entry. Let's go!"

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"A fine stunt," growled Shorty, "puttin' in a gal to race agin' me! It'll be duck soup ef she don't git kilt. I got a notion——"

"A fine stunt!" grinned the Señor Quijano, strolling up. "The people, they all cheer for the señorita—yes—and more they cheer, faster my daughter go! I bet we win!"

"I got twenty cents more I'll bet," began Eddie Owens.

"I accept!" and Quijano smiled, bowing low.

Shorty snorted and ran for his outfit. His team was hitched and waiting, with rodeo employees at the horses' heads. There was an admiring crowd about the wagon. As Shorty arrived, Dave Brofman, one of the sheriff's new deputies, greeted him cordially.

"Boss here?" asked Shorty brusquely.

"Yup," said Brofman, "we're all here, lookin' fer Perida. We combed the town fine but he wasn't thar. Sheriff thinks he's in the crowd out here—a lot o' Mexicans here, yuh know."

"Huh!" said Shorty, climbing to the wagon seat.

Five minutes later the two entries in the International Covered Wagon race stood at the starting line, on the track, in front of the grand stand. Enthusiasm was at high pitch. All the while spectators were cheering for Shorty at first, but when the pretty Señorita Quijano smiled a dazzling smile at the grand stand, Shorty lost twenty-five per cent of his admirers. The Mexicans, of course, were behind the señorita—solidly. Much money had been wagered on the race, which had been advertised up and down the San Luis valley as the big event of the rodeo. National feeling had been aroused. At the last moment Eddie Owens had been challenged by a strange Mexican to bet another dollar on the race, and as the teams lined up Eddie was anxiously buttonholing all friends in sight, begging for the loan of a dollar.

"I'm plungin'," admitted Eddie recklessly.

The real plungers, at that moment, however, were the twelve broncs out on the track. The starter's pistol cracked and the two big wagons lurched forward as one, with every bronc straining in the traces. The grand stand rose as one man and whooped. The señorita had the rail, which Shorty had graciously granted her without argument. Shorty stood up, anchored by his lines, and yelled at his horses. The girl shook out her reins vigorously. It was a mad scramble from the very start and the big canvas-covered wagons swayed and creaked.

"Thar is one born every minute!" said Sheriff Joe Cook sadly, as he watched the start. The sheriff was weary. He and his twelve volunteer deputies had searched in vain for Manuel Perida.

"One what?" asked Doc Healey, standing beside the sheriff.

"One fool—like Shorty!" explained Cook, drearily.

At the quarter post the two racing teams were practically neck and neck. At the half Shorty's lead team of gray bronchos were perhaps a head in front of the señorita's calico leaders. The grand stand was shouting itself hoarse.

"Señorita!"

"Shorty!"

The Mexican section of the grand stand had lost all semblance of order. Sleek Mexican merchants were tossing expensive hats high in the air and not bothering to watch where they lit. Fat señoras were embracing one another. Prayers and pious exclamations mingled with more expressive expletives. Eddie Owens had lost his head completely. He had just bet his silver cigarette case, his signet ring, his watch and watch charm, and he was now looking for some one who would put up something against his new seven-dollar emerald-colored shirt.

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"Señorita—ah, the señorita!"

"Come on, Shorty, come on!"

At the half Shorty had lost his lead. The señorita's calico lead team had forged ahead half a length, but she lost that advantage on the three-quarter turn, and the two teams swung recklessly into the home stretch coming as hard as the dozen crazy ponies could gallop. The señorita, it appeared, was an excellent driver. She handled her ribbons with skill, but Shorty was not only a good driver, he was a bit of a daredevil, too. He was standing up now, cracking his whip, and the ponies in his hitch were scurrying forward with apprehensive, quivering flanks. They were running! Shorty was ahead, by a matter of inches, as the two outfits swept past the grand stand. There was another mile to go. The crowds cheered madly.

"I've just bet my boots, Shorty; an' my vest, an' my belt, an' my ridin' breeches!" whooped Eddie Owens in supplication, as the racers passed. "Yuh gotta win—Shorty—*yuh gotta!*"

But Shorty didn't hear Eddie's shout. He was too busy swinging his six around the quarter turn again. The señorita had begun to use her whip with telling effect. The two outfits were again neck and neck. The rodeo committee in the judges' stand were swearing that this was the race of races! Monte Vista had never seen such a thrilling event as this International Covered Wagon race before. The Mexicans in the south end of the grand stand were reminding the saints that the señorita must win! Eddie Owens had offered to bet a week's labor at anything—wood chopping, bean hoeing, or sheep shearing—against a thin dime, even a Canadian dime, that Shorty would win.

Around the curve went the raging teams, the señorita's paints pulling ahead inch by inch. Shorty gritted his teeth. The glory of the United States, the honor of Monte Vista, the safety of Eddie Owens' two dollars and fifteen cents, to say nothing about the security of Eddie's hat, pants, shirt, were all at stake. Shorty swung his long whip dexterously, but this time the whip did more than hiss through the air. It barely touched the off gray on Shorty's lead team, but that animal jumped as though a bee had struck it. Its teammate followed suit. Then the swing team increased its gallop, and the wheelers whirled after perforce. Inch by inch Shorty recovered his lost ground.

"Giddap!" whooped Shorty, as the two scrambling ponies flattened out for real speed on the back stretch of the track, "come on along, yuh fuzztails! Shake a laig! We gotta win this race—I need that hundred dollars—I'm outta a job account o' yuh fuzzies! Let's go—yippee—*whoopee-ee-ee!*"

The long whip whistled through the air, aimed for a lagging swing team animal, but never landed. Before it reached its mark there was a scream from the señorita—a wild piercing scream—and Shorty dropped the whip as though he had been shot. The señorita, sitting sideways on the wagon seat, flung both hands heavenward and screamed again. The reins dropped from her lap and were whirled over the dash in the twinkling of an eye. The señorita's face was deathly pale, and the paint ponies, sensing that something was wrong, took their bits in their teeth. They'd run sure enough now!

The grand stand heard those bloodcurdling screams, but not as plainly as Shorty heard them! The grand stand grew strangely mute as the señorita's teams took their heads. The girl fixed her gaze on Shorty for the briefest of a fleeting moment. Her hands were still high in the air; her face was blanched with terror; her eyes wide and appealing. Then she went on until the

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top of her covered wagon shut her off from Shorty's sight, for her six paints were running with a vengeance now. Shorty had a second to think. He yelled at his horses, reached for the whip, missed it, and remembered he had dropped it. Then his eyes lit on a little pile of pebbles he had thoughtfully stored away at one end of the seat for the express benefit of the near gray leader—a vicious horse that generally had to be pelted to make any speed. Shorty reached for the little stones. He threw one at the near leader, hit the off leader with another. Gradually—with heartbreaking deliberation, it seemed—Shorty began to overhaul the señorita's outfit.

"She'll crash the fence, sure," cried Shorty, "fer thar's no stoppin' them broncs now! I got one chance in a thousand, I'll——"

It seemed an age to the spectators before Shorty's wagon, careening from side to side, crept up on the Quijano wagon. It seemed an eternity before the crowds saw Shorty stand up and prepare for action. Some thought he would snatch the girl from her perilous seat on the runaway wagon. Others decided, on the spur of the moment, that Shorty would desert his outfit and leap to the other wagon and endeavor to stop it. Another scream from the girl! Shorty dropped his handful of reins, and jumped. The crowd caught its breath. For a brief moment it looked as though Shorty had leaped short, but he hadn't. He scrambled up on the señorita's wagon, seized her in his arms, and jumped again; this time off the señorita's outfit and toward the grassy infield, where a soft landing might be possible. It was a flying leap from a swaying wagon. There had been no time to judge distances accurately. The crowd began to cheer just as Shorty with the señorita held close, struck the infield fence—and the cheer changed to a long-drawn groan.

The fence, aged and weathered, gave away under the impact. The girl and her rescuer rolled to the ground just as a thunderous crash echoed over the arena. The two speeding wagons had come together with a terrific smash. Splinters flew through the air. An injured horse screamed in pain. The dust cleared away, to show one wagon on its side, the other wagon partly on top of it, while a tangled mass of crazed horses, several of them squealing, were kicking and biting in a desperate effort to flee the mêlée. The spectators and the rodeo hands stood paralyzed for a full minute.

"Hurt?" groaned Shorty, shaking the wan señorita.

"No—no!" cried the señorita, struggling to sit up. "It was awful—it was Manuel—his senses have deserted him! Early this morning he begged that he might hide in our big wagon. I thought he was sick—he look so bad! Then I hear that the white men want him! I beg father to let me drive the wagon so that he should not find my Manuel in it. We were engaged, señor! So I drive, but Manuel suddenly jump up from under tarpaulin in wagon, an' point gun an' say he keel me an' himself! I scream then, an'——"

"Manuel?" asked Shorty, blinking, while his mouth twitched in pain. "Manuel—Manuel who? I seem to remember——"

"Manuel Perida, my fiancé," began the señorita, sobbing.

Shorty jumped to his feet. He saw people running toward the scrambled wagons. Others were coming toward him and the girl. He whirled and made for the wrecked wagons, diving into the pile of débris. His head hurt, his knees gave way beneath him, but he went on. He yanked his handcuffs off his belt, and when he saw an unconscious man in the ripped bed of the señorita's wagon, he snapped the cuffs over that man's yielding wrists. He dragged him

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out—one step, two steps, three steps, four—five—and then Shorty suddenly keeled over. He went down in a heap.

Sheriff Cook and his friend, Doc Healey, were the first to reach Shorty's side. The doctor bent over and began to feel the senseless deputy with expert hands. The sheriff looked at the man cuffed to Shorty and recognized the swarthy fellow as Manuel Perida, for whom he and all his volunteer deputies had searched all day in vain. Tears came to the sheriff's eyes as he looked on the battered Shorty. The ex-deputy was barely breathing, it seemed. His face was cut and bruised. One arm was bent back under him. His clothing was torn. Doc Healey was working feverishly. Other men ran up, taking off their hats.

"Waal," groaned Sheriff Cook mournfully, gazing at his late deputy, "he insisted on all this hisself—got hisself to blame—murdered hisself recklessly—he would race—he would be a hero despite all! As I told him just this mawnin'—as Barnum said once, thar's one born every minute——"

Doc Healey looked up with an expansive grin.

"An' most o' 'em live," said the doctor, suavely. "This kid has got a coupla broken ribs an' he's fainted from pain—but in a day or two he'll be snappin' out of it nice; it ain't very serious——"

"Just a minute," whispered the perspiring sheriff. He dived into his pocket. He withdrew a glittering deputy's badge. He leaned over and pinned it on the unconscious Shorty's vest with trembling fingers. Then he stood up and spoke to the throng.

"Shorty is a fool," he said, "fer luck!"

AN OLD INDIAN TREATY

A HISTORIC document of rare interest was recently brought to light in going over some old papers left by Major P. B. Reading, of pioneer fame. The find consisted of the original treaty of peace made at Reading's ranch or Fort Reading, California, on August 16, 1851, between the several Indian tribes in that part of California and the United States Indian agent, O. M. Wozencraft. It was brought to light by Miss Alice M. Reading, of Anderson, California, daughter of Major Reading, while she was going through papers left by her father. The treaty assigned to the Indians all the land on the east side of the Sacramento River from the month of Ash Creek, at Balls Ferry, up that stream twenty-five miles and thence north to Pitt River.

Under the terms of the treaty, the Indians were to be given five hundred head of beef cattle to average in weight five hundred pounds, seventy-five sacks of flour of one hundred pounds each, within two years from the date of the treaty. In addition, each man and boy of the various tribes was to be given one pair of strong pantaloons and one red-flannel shirt; each woman and girl was to receive one linsey gown, and other materials and dressmaking supplies.

The Indians were also allowed seventy-five brood mares and four stallions, three hundred milch cows and sixteen bulls, twenty-one yoke of work cattle with yokes and chains, ten work mules or horses, twenty-two plows of assorted sizes, seventy-five garden or corn hoes, twenty-five spades and four grindstones.

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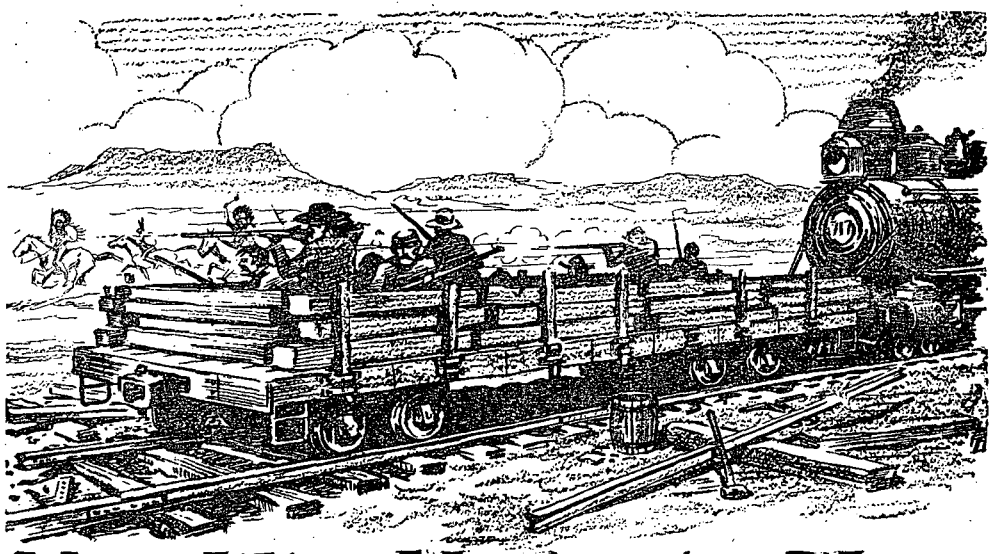

Men Who Made the West

(THE U.P. BOYS ~ CHIEFS OF THE SHINING RAILS)

By Edward H. Smith

Author of "The Silver King of Colorado," etc.

IT is a truism that next to God—or nature—the railroads did most for the West. That being so, who shall vision the conquest and aggrandizement of the empire beyond the turgid Missouri without some memory of the doughty gentlemen who laid the Union Pacific out into the wilderness?

One of the saddest limitations of history is its failure or inability to record the masses of men who take part in great events, the unsung privates of wars and battles, the humble delvers in vast works—the sufferers, the toilers. But the human mind does not grasp masses or movements. It wants epochs and events personified. So here we can do no more than make a little bow of reverence to the tough Titans who dragged the rails and laid the ties and drove the spikes of the Union Pacific. We know them as a dim procession of shadows that moved the earth and were laid asleep in it, with hardly a hail and farewell. We are forced to think of them as the instruments of their two shining chiefs, Dodge and Ames.

The first of these was the soldier and engineer who had the vision and performed the Titan labors. The other was the politician and financier who managed to put the huge and unwieldy enterprise solidly on its feet and support it to maturity and completion. Naturally, the dreamer came before the backer, so first of Dodge.

His parents christened him Grenville Mellen, of their name, and he was born in the little settlement of Putnamville, now Danvers, Massachusetts, on April 21, 1831. Old Sylvanus Dodge, the father of our protagonist, was the postmaster at South Danvers, as well as the town's chief stationer and bookseller. He received and distributed the papers from Boston and from London, and supplied books for the counting

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house and the library, as required by his limited patronage.

In this shop young Grenville Dodge spent the vacations between terms of the village school, and here he made the acquaintance of letters and learning. This is not quite accurate, for he also drove the butcher cart of Lambert & Merrill's store in the summer months. Evenings he spent in study and preparation for college. In 1845 and 1846 he attended Durham Academy in New Hampshire, and at the end of the latter year he was admitted to Norwich University, in Vermont, where he took the military and engineering course, and graduated as a civil engineer in 1850.

The following year, young Dodge followed the example of some of his schoolmates and went West. He settled first at Peru, Illinois, where he was almost immediately appointed to the engineering force of the Illinois Central Railway. He saw no opportunity in this place and took a similar job with the Chicago & Rock Island, which was just then starting to build its line westward to the Mississippi. Its chief engineer was Peter A. Dey, a man who meant much to Dodge for years afterward. What the standing and dignities of a young college-trained engineer were may be judged from the fact that Dodge served as an ax man under Dey, which means that he did more tree chopping and stake driving than anything else. But Dey soon saw promise in the Yankee lad and promoted him to the head of a party, sending him out to do responsible surveying and construction. He located the Bureau Valley branch of the Rock Island at this time.

Then Fate stepped in again. Toward the end of 1851, the Mississippi & Missouri River Railroad projected its line across Iowa to the "Big Muddy," and Dey was appointed chief engineer and constructor. He took young Dodge with him, and thus the boy from Danvers reached the great frontier river and saw the incalculable and inscrutable empire of the West.

Durant & Farnham, the contractors who were building the Mississippi & Missouri, though they went about their construction after the typical fashion of the time—little by little, as the money was forthcoming—were not entirely blind to the possibilities of a railroad reaching out to California and the newly discovered gold fields—which were, in the exaggerated ideas of the day, expected to last forever and turn the growth of the country toward the West. Dey and Dodge, primarily occupied in building through Iowa, were instructed to keep in mind the transcontinental possibilities; and Dodge, with the eagerness of youth and ambition, seized upon this idea as his special food. He proposed that surveys be made and soon was out with a party making a complete reconnoissance of the territory from Davenport, by way of Des Moines, to Council Bluffs, then a straggling Mormon settlement.

Dodge went across the river, losing most of his baggage and supplies in the treacherous eddies, and surveyed a line along the valley of the Platte River. He was impressed by the level prairies, the gently rising grades, the timber, and the water supply. In this valley, for hundreds of miles, there were only ordinary obstacles and many attractions. He advanced boldly into the West, met the Indians, and managed to keep them from open hostility, reached the high plateaus, and finally the ridges of the Rockies and laid his surveyor's lines through all the available passes. He understood what Tom Benton had said at St. Louis seven years before—Benton was still alive—that the buffaloes knew the best routes over the Rockies. It was common sense worth regarding.

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All about the young railroad engineer was a grand and gloomy wilderness, peopled only by the turbulent red man and the shaggy bison. These two were hunter and hunted. Accordingly, poor Lo also knew the best passes through those towering and dangerous mountains, those jagged peaks of a frozen inferno. Dodge made friends with the Indians, followed their trails, and soon found that their long occupation of the region, with necessity as their whip, had driven them through the right defiles. Over the best of the Indian trails, as selected by Dodge in 1853, the Union Pacific now coils its way out and up from Omaha to Ogden.

Early in 1854, Dodge returned to his Western home in Peru, Illinois, and carried Miss Annie Brown, a local belle, back to Salem, Massachusetts, with him to be his wife. After their honeymoon they hurried West to Council Bluffs, lived for a time in a log cabin on what is now Madison Street, and then moved into a brick house on Broadway. His railroad work being temporarily suspended, Dodge, like all intelligent and forehanded pioneers, looked about for promising land. His notice had previously been drawn to the Elkhorn Valley, now a suburban and agricultural district west of Omaha. There, in February, 1855, he became the first settler, and in 1856 he took his wife and small daughter to live there in the log house he had caused to be built on his large farm. But in November the Crow Indians decided that they didn't want any white men settling in their happy hunting grounds west of the Big Muddy, and went on the war path. Dodge was warned in time and fled to the tiny village of Omaha with his wife and child. When spring came up the river, with its misty green on the cottonwoods and its strange stirrings of the waste and waters, the conservative Dodge moved the family back to Council Bluffs.

He now engaged in freighting along the Overland Trail to Colorado and Utah, losing the lives of some of his men, shooting some Indians and more bison, and making a nice bit of money wherewith he went into the banking business under the firm name of Baldwin & Dodge. Baldwin, Dodge, and Pegram, their freighting partner, sent the first supplies to Denver after the news of the gold strikes in Colorado.

These gentlemen were citizens of their times and saw no harm in turning an honest dollar by trading with the Indians. They did a thriving business with the Omaha, Pawnee, Sioux, Crow, Shoshone, Arapahoe, and other tribesmen.

Dodge did not fail when there was a call to arms—the great one of his generation. In July, 1861, he recruited, formed, and became colonel of the Fourth Iowa Infantry. He was at once sent to Washington to procure arms and ammunition for his soldiers, as well as supplies, money, and other equipment. Soon he was marching off to the battle front in Virginia. He rose quickly to the rank of brigadier and then major general of volunteers, fought with great distinction and was wounded at Pea Ridge in 1862; he returned to his command on recovery and was in the field with Sherman before Atlanta. Dodge was also in the field when Lee gave up at Appomattox Court House and remained in the army until May, 1866, as commandant of the important Western outpost, Fort Leavenworth, also on the great Missouri.

Meantime, the greater work of the man had been unfolding. As early as 1857, Dodge's dreams of the transcontinental railroad had reached the ears of a man destined to great authority. Abraham Lincoln was at that time a railroad attorney, representing sev-

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eral companies in Illinois and Iowa. He visited Council Bluffs in the summer of that year, met Dodge, and listened to the engineer-banker's enthusiastic but measured talk of a road that would cross the prairies, climb the mountains, and link California and the Pacific coast soldily into the Union. Lincoln was more than impressed, and when, in 1862, the Union Pacific bill was before him, he thought first of Dodge and found that the engineer was a major general in command at Corinth, Mississippi. The president summoned him to Washington by telegraph and they again discussed the vast work projected. As a result of the interview with Dodge, Lincoln issued the proclamation which fixed Council Bluffs as the starting point of the Union Pacific.

The railroad was chartered on July 1st of that year, with John A. Dix as president, Thomas C. Durant as vice president and general manager, Peter Dey as chief engineer, and the Casement brothers as contractors. Again Dodge's fortunes followed that of Dey; for, early in 1866, the latter, worn by hardships and reverses, resigned his office, and on May 1st Major General Grenville Mellen Dodge was unanimously chosen chief engineer and told to go ahead and build the railroad. The dream was becoming a reality.

Dodge set out again from the Omaha terminus and went West with a great exploring party—engineering party, one might better say. The country was systematically gone over from the Arkansas River on the south to the Sweetwater on the north, and from the Missouri to the California State line. In California, Collis P. Huntington was already building his roads. Nor was it long before there developed a race between the two roads for the possession of Ogden as a terminus.

In the period from May, 1866, to May, 1869, Dodge and his men ran all of fifteen thousand miles of transit lines and did twenty-five thousand miles of reconnoissance. They bore the winter blizzards and the appalling prairie summer suns. They starved and died of thirst, fought and were scalped by the Indians, suffered ten thousand tortures, and left their whitening bones in every pass. But they got through.

Meantime, another drama of pioneer railroading was unfolding farther East. The original Union Pacific grant had been so narrow that not a dollar was subscribed when the first bond issue was offered. A second and more liberal grant did a little better and a start was made to build the first hundred miles of road west from Omaha—but only a start. The contractor could not do the work, and his failure further retarded the enterprise. However, the great obstacles were two and of a general character. First, most people in the East, especially those who had money, looked upon the railroad to California as a kind of wild man's dream. Where was it going to get its business, its patronage? From the Indians and the sagebrush? Again, the country was at war, gold was at a premium of one hundred and fifty, prices were high, and no one knew whether the Union was going to survive or whether the South would triumph, make an onerous peace, and plunge the North, with its railroad and industrial plans, into hopeless bankruptcy. It was, indeed, a parlous time for road building.

However, a few men of vision, among them Abraham Lincoln, saw that this thing must and would be. Accordingly, they cast about for a man of sufficient wealth, reputation, and energy to surmount the obstacles and carry through the road. The choice fell upon a man almost forgotten in this generation—Oakes Ames.

Ames, the other great figure in the building of the ocean-to-ocean railroad,

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was nearly as old as Dodge's father, having been born on January 10, 1804, at Easton, Massachusetts. His father was Oliver Ames, who had begun life as a blacksmith and gradually became a manufacturer of picks and shovels. His father was still far from rich in Oakes' early boyhood, and so it happened that the future railroad financier and builder recived no extended schooling. He went to the public schools of his native place and for a few months to an academy. Then he was taken into his father's business and immediately began to show his quick perceptive powers, his energy, and his Yankee thrift. This was about 1825.

The firm was now well established and making money fast. The country was busy delving, quarrying, mining, digging, and growing. Consequently, there was a high demand for picks and shovels, which the Ameses knew how to make so cheaply and well that they came soon to dominate the market. In the early '40s they branched out into the newer mining fields and began to let prospectors and wildcat concerns have their goods on credit or on a speculative basis. Before they knew it, the Ameses had run up a loss of nearly a million, but they were already so well established that they weathered the hurricane. Then came the California gold rush of 1849, as the result of which the firm recouped its losses in a few years. It managed to get through the panic of 1857 safely, and in 1860 was rated at four million dollars. It was now the property of the two sons, Oakes and Oliver, Jr., the father, who died soon after, having retired.

Then came the Civil War. Steel in every form was needed, and the Ames forges were never cool. Their factories were extended and again enlarged. They worked night and day, with double shifts of men, and every train going south from Massachusetts carried their picks, shovels, intrenching tools, bayonets, gun barrels, cannon, and what not to the military stores behind the Virginia front. In two or three years the Ames wealth stood at eight millions and, by the time the war was over, at ten. Vast wealth for those days.

In 1860, Oakes Ames had taken his place with the new Republican party and the Abolition movement. Two years later he was sent to Congress. He never made a speech; he served on no important committees; yet, because of his business ability and his great fortune, he was one of the most influential men in Washington.

This was the man to whom the leaders turned when the Union Pacific became financially stalled a few miles out of Omaha. Ames reorganized the Credit Mobilier of America, brought the subscriptions up to two and one half millions, and by the fall of 1866 had completed the first hundred miles of road west from Omaha. But he soon discovered that his new job wasn't all beer and skittles. Two parties developed among his associates. One wanted to make as much money as possible out of the building contracts and let the devil take the hindmost. Ames, however, stood out with a really valiant integrity for the interests of the bondholders and the country. The money, he said, must be honestly spent, leaving a reasonable profit for the contractors; the materials must be right and the construction permanent. This was a great public work, and honor required of him a decent monument in the shape of a useful property.

There was a sharp division, resulting in a stalemate. Finally, the thing was compromised by making Ames take over the contracts personally on some complicated sharing and accounting basis that is of not the least interest here. How strange all this sounds, how incredible it seems that a railroad

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corporation to which had been given thousands of miles of the richest grain land in the finest agricultural region in our West—an empire in itself larger than many an Eastern State and richer to-day than any second-rank European kingdom of that time—should have been composed of men who could see nothing but to-morrow's dishonest profit! They had no sense of the greatness of their work, of its meaning to the nation. To them it was just another government contract, another chance for loot.

But through all perplexities and heartburnings this son of a New England blacksmith, now risen to vast wealth and imperial power, fought on with some of the sturdiness of his people. I do not pretend that he was altogether honest or even half unselfish. He saw gain. He saw glory. But he was willing to earn rather than to steal. A word that Lincoln had said to him in urging that he undertake the task made him scent lasting renown beyond those snowy mountains. "The remembered man of the generation," was what the president had promised.

How ironical! The Credit Mobilier scandal broke about Ames' head, with its ruin and its evidence of venality in Congress. He and his brother went bankrupt for eight and one half million dollars. An arrangement was made with the creditors so that part of Ames' personal fortune was recouped, but when he died, in 1873, it was under a cloud that has not altogether lifted to this day.

But he had seen the Union Pacific built before he failed and died. Under the capable field leadership of Dodge, two hundred and sixty miles of the road had been completed before Christmas of 1866. And the work went forward indefatigably. Dodge was the dynamo, the inexhaustible leader. Now laying out towns, water depots, storehouses, division terminals; now back with the ever-lagging supply trains bringing the steel from the East and the ties from the North; again at the first front with the Hell-on-Wheels Division, he was always on hand. Sometimes the Indians, though mostly friendly to him, would forget their pledges and swoop down on a train. Dodge participated in more than one fight with them and must at times have regretted ever having been an Indian trader.

Once a train was held up by the redskins, looted, and set afire, while the remainder of the crew and workmen were trying to save their lives. Dodge, hearing of the raid, rallied some discharged workmen, put arms into their hands, and rushed to the rescue. He approached, detrained his men, commanded them to fall in, and was astonished to see that they knew the command and obeyed. They went forward steadily and fired with such good effect that the Indian besiegers whirled away with all the speed there was in their ponies.

But it was more work than fight, more aches than thrills. The supply trains came running up as far as the tracks had been laid, the sturdy Irish workers pulled one rail off at a time, carrying it between their arms in a long group, and ran forward to where the ties had already been laid and half ballasted. Down plopped the rail, next to it another. The gauges were set, the spikes driven home, the added ballast tamped into place, and another fifty or sixty feet of the Union Pacific had been completed.

> "Then drill, ye Paddies, drill;
> Drill, ye terriers, drill.
> Drill all day,
> No sugar in yer tay—
> Workin' on the U. P. Railway!"

So they chanted as the road went steadily westward. Now it was at North Platte, now Julesburg; and then came the news of triumph after tri-

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umph as the wild country was crossed and the mountain subdued—Sydney, Cheyenne, Laramie, Benton, Bryan, Green River, Wasatch, Ogden, Corinne, Lampo, and at last Promontory Point. Word was flashed of completion—of meeting the Southern Pacific workmen at Promontory Point on May 10, 1869. The Union Pacific, one thousand seven hundred and twenty-one miles long—across the prairies haunted by the Indians, through the mammoth mountains, traversing an uninhabited wilderness—had been laid in three years and ten days after Grenville Dodge took charge.

There had been hard and rough days. No such work ever has been or ever will be completed without cruelty and bloodshed. The men who did the work were hot-blooded Irishmen, newly arrived, many of them. Not pretty fellows to deal with out there in the wilderness, a thousand miles from aught that might restrain them save violence and death. The little frontier towns became roosts of gamblers, robbers, and murderers. The leaders killed the needed workmen and tried to disaffect others. One of the worst camps of the sort developed at Julesburg. Dodge sent word to General Jack Casement, one of the builders, instructing him to take his track force and help the sheriff and marshal to clean up the town. In the fall of 1867 they visited the town and found peace and quiet.

"What did you do, general?" said Dodge to Casement.

"There they are, general," said Casement to Dodge, waving his hand toward the cemetery. "They died with their boots on, but they brought peace."

When the Union Pacific had got to Promontory Point, connected with the Huntington line, and driven the last spike needed to carry a man on wheels from Omaha to San Francisco Bay, there was still an unwelded link. The traveler from east of the Missouri had to get off the train at Council Bluffs, cross the river on a ferry, and take the Union Pacific at Omaha. Obviously a bridge over the bosom of the big yellow stream was needed. And Dodge was selected to plan and build it. Erected in 1870, it still stands, little changed. It can hardly be called either wonderful or beautiful, but in its day it was one of the greatest iron bridging works ever undertaken and men came from miles to marvel at it.

After being elected to Congress for a term, Dodge left the Union Pacific at the end of 1870 and turned his talents to other railroading enterprises. He was connected with the building of the Texas & Pacific, from Shreveport, Louisiana, to San Diego, California. He made surveys for other roads in Missouri, Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah. In 1875 and 1876 he was in Europe, studying the railroad systems there. When he returned, he became head of the Texas & Pacific to resume its construction, at the same time undertaking to complete the line from Shreveport to New Orleans. The Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad was another of his constructions, as were various lines in Mexico.

At last Dodge wearied of work and glory. He was rich and time was passing. He turned his face to Council Bluffs, where he had laid the foundations of his fortune. There, on a slope of the bluffs rising above the tawny Missouri, he had long since built one of the finest homes of the region, in handsome gardens, shaded with venerable trees. Here, on a golden June afternoon, he could watch the river, now risen to its vast tide of summer waters from the distant snow freshets. Surely he thought sometimes of how his destiny had been encoiled in those turbulent eddies. There

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lay his Rubicon and across it his greater than Rome.

And here on January 3, 1916, Dodge died, in his eighty-fifth year, declaring that he belonged to no creed and needed no aid for his crossing of the Styx.

One wonders if, in the great clarity before sundown, he thought a little sadly of Oakes Ames.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Chicadee

THIS familiar, hardy, restless little bird, sometimes known as the black-capped titmouse, is well known because it inhabits nearly all parts of North America. Protected by a remarkably long, soft, downy plumage of blue-black and white, it is able to endure the severest cold of the northern regions, and it is during these cold snaps that the bird comes out of its secluded wooden dwelling and approaches mankind, ostensibly to obtain food: insects, their larvæ, and eggs, of which they are particularly fond. In the month of September the chicadees leave the woods, assemble sociably in gardens and orchards, and even enter the thronging cities in quest of delicacies which their forests deny them. Large seeds of many kinds—especially those which are oily, as the seeds of the sunflower, and pine and spruce kernels—are sought after. These seeds are seized in the claws and held against a branch until picked open by the bill when the contents are eagerly devoured. Fat of various kinds, even animal fat, is also eaten greedily. Spiders and eggs of destructive moths, especially those of the cankerworm, are relished by the chicadee. In the winter the birds may be seen swallowing small pieces of snow to quench their thirst.

The chicadees roost and breed in the hollow of decayed trees, often using the deserted nest of some woodpecker, or building one of their own of soft moss, hair and feathers. Here in the end of April, the female lays from six to twelve white eggs covered with tiny red specks, which are hatched in about seven weeks. Often the chicadee will hatch another brood toward the end of July. The young fledglings have all the external marks of the adult; the head is as black, and they chatter and skip about with all the agility and self-possession of their parents, who appear, nevertheless, very solicitous for their safety. The family continue to associate through the autumn and winter, moving from tree to tree, and keeping up a continual noise, whistling and chirping, as they peck at the trees for hidden insects.

The chicadee is seldom seen near water—often, even in summer, it remains in dry, shady, and secluded woods. But even as early as October, roving families urged by necessity and the failure of their ordinary insect-fare, begin to frequent orchards and gardens: familiar, hungry, indigent, but industrious, prying with restless anxiety into every cranny of the bark or holes in decayed trees after dormant spiders and larvæ. The quaint cry and jingling warble of the chicadee are heard even in winter, adding a note of cheerfulness to the quiet and dreary winters of the coldest parts of America.

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Buzzard Betrayed

By **Frank Triem**

Author of "Noosed," etc.

IMPELLED by the foot of the stalwart brakeman, Phil Jennings whirled through the air, turned over twice, and landed in a scraggly growth of sage. The last of the empty freight cars clicked by; and with a groan and a half-hearted curse the evicted moocher untangled himself and got to his feet.

He was a thin, frail young man, of twenty-two or twenty-three years. His tow-colored hair hung about his ears; he had a retreating chin and rather shifty eyes. This wasn't the first time he had been kicked off a train, however; and now he began to peer furtively about him. He saw that he was in one of the desert towns of the region. A weathered little station was a scant twenty paces away, and beyond it, running at right angles to the tracks, he perceived Main Street. There were perhaps twenty or thirty tumble-down buildings, some deserted, some obviously open for business. Phil Jennings wondered what business could ever come to this God-forsaken place.

And then for the second time that morning, bad luck descended upon the youth. This time in the form of Town Marshal Al Parsons—a beefy-faced man, with a neck like a piece of stove-pipe and hands as big as shovels. With all the skill of a rheumatic elephant Parsons had crept up on the luckless wanderer; and now, with a roar and a rush, he made his capture.

"Got you!" he bellowed. "What do you mean by dropping off here? What do you think we're running, anyways—a rest home for Weary Willies? I'd ought to put you in the cooler for a month or two. But I'm a kind-hearted guy, I am—and if you head right on up this track, and keep going, you will surely——"

Phil Jennings drooped in the big man's grasp; but now his shifty eyes alighted on an interested group of spectators. To these he appealed, paying no attention to Parsons.

"Have a heart, gents!" he begged. "I ain't et since day before yesterday, and I'm so thirsty I could drink a cement sidewalk. Don't let this guy

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run me out without something to eat an'——"

With a bellow of rage, the town marshal shook his prisoner, and the youth's concluding words ended in a choked gurgle.

"So!" Parsons snarled. "Try to go over me head, hey? Well, just for that I'm going to put you in the coop. And I'll keep you there until you've got whiskers a foot long. I'll——"

It was at this rather critical juncture in Jennings' fortunes that one of the bystanders stepped forward. He was a small man, obviously only a jump ahead of old age, for his rough mustache was iron-gray, and his tanned face was seamed with a thousand little wrinkles. But his eyes, if penetrating, were kind; and when he spoke his voice was mellow and friendly.

"Mebbe the kid *is* hungry an' thirsty, Al," he ventured, staring closely at the cringing captive. "He don't look to me like he'd been overfed."

The bulky officer scowled.

"What's that got to do with it?" he wanted to know. "If we started in to feed every hungry bum that came this way, we'd soon have an army of 'em on our hands."

The little man nodded.

"That's right, too," he agreed. "But I'll tell you what, Al. Just you turn this young gent over to me for a while. I'll give him a feed and help him try to get back on his feet."

The marshal appeared to consider; at last, unwillingly, he relinquished his hold on Jennings' skinny arm.

"All right," he growled. "But watch out he don't swipe the shirt off your back. I know how these fellows are!"

Ten minutes later his friend in need had led Phil Jennings to the town's little restaurant, where the young wanderer gorged himself until he could hold not another mouthful. During the process, the older man had sat silent and preoccupied; but now he spoke.

"Well, son, that's that!" said he. "Now, I'll introduce myself. My name's Jerry Duncan, although most folks call me just plain 'Beezer.' What's yore label?"

The younger man told him, and Beezer Duncan nodded.

"All right, Phil. Now I been thinking: You got a weak face, but mebbe you'd like a chance to make something of yoreself after all. It happens I need a man to help me work my mine —I got a little dry-claim about fifteen mile out in the desert. If yore willing to work hard for yore board an' mebbe a quarter share of what we take out, you can have the position."

Phil Jennings considered the offer. Generally he tried to sidestep work whenever he saw it coming his way; he had always found it easier to drift and trust to luck for his next meal. But for regular grub like this, and a bed at night—that made things different. Besides, Beezer Duncan had mentioned a quarter share of everything they took out. Jennings was totally ignorant of desert mining, and like most people he had an exaggerated idea of the profits from such an enterprise; now he decided that this might very easily develop into a good thing.

"Very well, Mr. Duncan," he agreed. "I'll be glad to help you work your mine, for a quarter share of the profits and my food and a bed. Let's go!"

Before they left town, however, Beezer Duncan asked the young man a rather startling question.

"You ain't got a gun, have you?"

Jennings shook his head.

"Then, we'll stop in at Jake Durham's place and buy you one. There's a bunch of outlaws been raising Ned hereabouts, and you might as well be ready to give me a lift if we should run into 'em!"

At Durham's hardware store, Duncan bought his new partner a heavy-framed .44-40 single-action Colt, a hol-

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ster, and two boxes of ammunition. Then, with the gun dragging at his belt, Jennings accompanied Beezer Duncan to the stable where the latter had left his mules. A quarter of an hour later they were in the desert.

All through the blazing hot day they moved slowly into the east, and with the coming of sunset they reached Duncan's place—a little, two-room adobe hut at the edge of a small oasis. There was a spring close by, and two hundred yards away was the shaft that Beezer Duncan had sunk. It was surmounted by a crude windlass.

They unloaded the mules and turned them into a small but well-built corral which Duncan had constructed. After that they carried the supplies they had brought into the hut, and set about the preparation of supper.

After the meal, Beezer Duncan sat in a homemade chair just outside the door, watching the last light in the west fade and smoking his pipe. Phil Jennings seated himself on the ground with his back to the side of the building. After a long silence he spoke.

"I reckon there's quite a little gold in these flats, if a fellow only knew where to look," he said. He waited impatiently for the old man's answer.

"Yes," said Beezer Duncan. "Yes, there's plenty of gold, if you know where to look." He puffed hard at his pipe, and then resumed: "It's all in knowing where to look. Now take me, for instance. I've spent near thirty years poking around, and about all I've made was a living. Until I came here. That was two months ago; but now I've got something like two thousand dollars' worth of gold buried in the floor under the stove. Naturally, I ain't told nobody about it except you, and I wouldn't have told you if you wasn't my pard. If folks got to know about it there'd be a regular old-time stampede."

He rambled on; but Jennings wasn't listening. At the mention of two thousand dollars so close at hand, the younger man's heart had begun to pound. He realized presently that the old fellow had asked him something; hardly knowing what he replied to, he grunted in the affirmative. Beezer Duncan continued his monologue; and Jennings continued to think. He had never done anything really crooked before; but this, he told himself, was the chance of a lifetime.

When the two sought their bunks an hour or so later, Beezer went almost immediately to sleep; but for a long time Jennings lay staring at the little window high in the opposite wall. When finally he dozed off he had decided to make that gold his—and within the next twenty-four hours.

He awoke with the odor of frying bacon and boiling coffee strong in his nostrils, and tumbled heavily from his bunk. The sky in the east was amber and rose with the coming of the sun; in one corner of the cabin, bending over the little sheet-iron stove, he could see the compact form of Beezer Duncan. Duncan heard him, turned, and drawled a greeting; then once more he was busy with the breakfast. Remembering his decision of the night before, Jennings buckled on his six-gun, resolved to strike at the first opportunity.

But that opportunity seemed very slow in coming. The two worked in the shaft all morning, Duncan at the bottom shoveling the ore into the bucket and Jennings raising it on the creaking windlass. At noon the old man climbed the ladder, and for just an instant the young fellow thought of knocking him out as he emerged; but his nerve failed him, and Beezer Duncan reached the ground unhurt and unsuspecting. After lunch the work continued until the sun was low in the west.

About five o'clock Phil Jennings

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called to the man at the bottom of the thirty-foot shaft.

"I'm going over to the spring to get a drink, Beezer," he said. "Be back in a minute."

"All right, son. Reckon we'll call it a day."

Jennings had turned to go, when he heard the older man climbing laboriously up the shaft. He hesitated. This was as good a chance as he was likely to get; it was now or never. He slid his gun out of its holster. He wouldn't shoot Beezer, he decided; but he would knock him out. By the time the old man came to, Jennings and the gold would be gone.

With his heart pounding, the young fellow crouched at the opposite side of the shaft, waiting, while his victim clambered noisily up the ladder. Beezer Duncan would emerge with his back to Jennings; and the minute he gained the earth, the latter resolved to strike. He raised the gun high above his head. Duncan came in sight, climbing slowly. Now his head cleared the level of the earth. With a grunt, the old man seized the windlass and hauled himself to the surface. He stepped clear of the shaft and——

Phil Jennings struck. The long barrel of the six-gun caught his benefactor squarely over the head. With a strangled moan, the old man fell forward on his face.

Now that the crisis was past, Jennings realized that he was shaking and perspiring profusely. But he reholstered the gun, turned, and ran for the cabin. He would have to work fast, now. Inside, he seized the long-bladed kitchen knife and threw himself to his knees beside the stove on its little platform in the corner. Feverishly he started to dig.

The blade struck something hard, and with a sobbing imprecation the outlaw began to widen his excavation. Now he could see a heavy canvas sack. Two minutes later, with a mighty tug, he brought the treasure forth. In the deepening twilight, he could see that the sack was big and well-filled. Old Duncan hadn't been able to refine the contents, and now he had seven or eight pounds of gold, mixed with perhaps forty or fifty pounds of earth. Altogether, it made a heavy weight to carry far.

Jennings pocketed the old man's meager fund of ready money; then lugged the fortune for which he had risked so much outside; dropped it and turned toward the oasis, near the center of which was the corral where Duncan kept his mules. Swiftly he struck into the trail, and after much trouble succeeded in getting a saddle on one of the beasts. He led it back to the cabin. Then, clumsily—for he was unused to this sort of thing—Jennings lashed the sack of ore onto the saddle.

He had turned to go, when his eye chanced to light upon the motionless form by the shaft. Something about that twisted posture struck Jennings as ominous, and he hurried across and dropped to his knees beside Beezer Duncan. The older man's iron-gray hair was stained crimson; he lay as he had fallen. Putting his hand to Beezer's chest, Jennings was unable to feel the beat of the heart.

The young bandit got to his feet and stared stupidly. It wasn't possible that he had killed him—and yet so far as he could tell, Duncan was dead! He hadn't realized he had struck so hard. Now he had killed a man.

As the full realization of what this meant came to him, Jennings gave a cry of despair. For a moment a wild panic held him in its grip. He felt that he must run and hide—anywhere, just so he was out of sight of that twisted form. If they caught him, they would hang him!

With a great effort he regained control of his nerves. This changed

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things entirely; he must hide the gold and come back for it later. And he would have to make people think he hadn't killed old Duncan. He must rig up some sort of yarn that would be convincing.

In a flash he remembered what the older man had told him about bandits. That was it—he would blame it on these mysterious outlaws. He would hide the corpse; ride into town, and tell about seeing Duncan captured. They would never find the body; and it would be impossible to convict him, even if they suspected him.

Jennings glanced wildly about for a place in which to conceal the sack of ore. Then his eye lighted on the windlass, and he realized that no place would be so safe as this. Two minutes later he had brought the mule across, had cut the ropes holding the sack in place, and had tumbled it to the bottom of the shaft. Feverishly he shoveled the dirt down the hole, until the white blur of canvas was no longer visible.

He snatched off his hat, placed it on some rocks, and drew his gun. He fired, and saw a round hole appear in the crown of the Stetson. With nervous haste he cleaned the weapon, replaced the empty cartridge, and threw the shell away. Jamming the hat back on his head, he turned his attention to the task of disposing of the body.

Jennings was cool and methodical. He loaded the limp form across the saddle of the mule, and stood thinking. Presently he remembered a deserted shaft the old man had told him about, near the other end of the oasis. It was thickly covered with brush; Duncan had warned him not to fall in, as it was deep and he would have a hard time to get out. One could stand ten feet away and never see it; and that, surely, would be an ideal place.

In the deepening gloom, he found the underbrush hiding the shaft. Cautiously he explored the clump, until he discovered the opening. Lifting the limp form of Beezer Duncan from the saddle of the mule, he bore the body to the edge of the depression—and dropped it.

There sounded a muffled thud from below. Peering down, Phil Jennings could make out the white blur of Duncan's face. He stepped hastily back, and allowed the underbrush to spring into place. With a vast sigh of relief, the young outlaw climbed on the mule, and headed back toward the hut.

"That fixes everything," he murmured. "Now to ride to town and spread the alarm. I ought to get there by morning."

But in this he was mistaken. A stranger to this part of the country, he soon lost his way; and all that night he rode blindly, not knowing whether he was on the right track or not. With morning he realized that he wasn't; and it was noon when he came within sight of the cluster of weathered buildings that was the town.

Jennings rode straight to the sheriff's office, a little cubby-hole on the first floor of the six-room "hotel and boarding house." Sheriff Ted Raines, a short, heavy-set man with piercing gray eyes and a tanned face, was in. Quickly and easily Phil Jennings told his story.

"As I say, I had gone for water," he concluded. "I heard Beezer let out a yell, and I come running. As I burst from the oasis, I heard a shot, and felt my hat give a little kind of jerk. At the same time I saw two masked outlaws bending over the old man's body. But a third bandit was shooting at me; and I knew if I didn't light out I'd get hurt. So I beat it back to the corral, saddled a mule, and rode as fast as I could go. I lost my way, or I'd have been here this morning."

He finished his recital, and for a moment Sheriff Ted Raines stared unwinkingly at him. At last the officer nodded.

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"Sounds bad for Beezer," he said heavily. "Well, I'll get a posse together and ride out there. No, you don't have to come—better get a room and rest up a bit. I can see you been through a hard time. I'll let you know what we find when we get back."

Phil Jennings left the official and turned in at the next door. Ten minutes later he was installed in a little, dusty room that overlooked the street. There was a decrepit bed in one corner, a dresser with a drawer missing, a cracked looking-glass and a pitcher across the mouth of which a spider had made its home.

Jennings had seated himself on the edge of the bed when abruptly he became aware of a rumbling voice, which came apparently through the floor. He dropped to his knees. Pressing his ear to the worn carpet, he could make out the words of Sheriff Ted Raines; the latter was phoning for his deputies. He realized then that this room was directly above the officer's headquarters.

For the first time, the outlaw became aware of the fact that he was very tired. He had not slept since the night before last; and so he drew the rickety blind and lay down upon the old bed. Five minutes later he was asleep.

He did not sleep well, however, for the recent excitement had made him nervous. Every time he dozed off he could see the white face of Beezer Duncan peering up at him from the bottom of that old shaft. He finally managed to get to sleep; but in midafternoon he awoke, and resolved to stay awake.

He crossed to the window, raised the blind and looked out. The little street was apparently deserted; down near the railroad station he could see the stage getting ready for its trip to El Centro, the big city.

"This place is getting my goat," mused Jennings. "I'm nervous as a witch—although they don't seem to suspect me. I'd feel a good deal better if I was farther away, though. By golly, I believe I'll hop that stage and beat it!"

The bus driver had just finished his loading when Jennings accosted him.

"I'd like to ride to El Centro with you," the younger man said. "I'll take a round-trip ticket."

The driver peered intently at him from behind his smoked glasses. He shook his head.

"No, you won't. I'm plumb full up this trip—I couldn't take another fifty pounds without risking a broken spring. You'll have to wait till to-morrow."

The driver's tone was final; and, with a sinking feeling at his heart, young Jennings turned away. Before this he hadn't realized how much he wanted to get out of this part of the country—until the storm had blown over, at least. His heart began to beat smotheringly as he remembered the curious, unfriendly stare the driver had bent upon him. Could it be that he suspected him?

Jennings made his way back to his room and sat down to ponder his problem. A great uneasiness possessed him; and it didn't take him long to resolve to get out of town at any cost. If they wouldn't let him ride on the stage, he'd walk!

He stared moodily out the window. The shadows were lengthening fast; soon now the sun would drop behind the low ridge in back of town, and night would close in. And after that, he would fade quietly from the picture.

Another half hour dragged past. In an agony of impatience the youth waited while the afterglow of sunset thickened to twilight and darkness closed in. At last he judged it was safe to move. With a final glance through the window he left the building.

Unmolested, Jennings hurried up the empty street away from the railroad station. He had seen a trail leading

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out of town in that direction; and, he reasoned, he was less likely to be picked up in that part of the country than along the tracks. The houses and stores were behind him now; ahead was a gentle rise, dotted here and there with cacti or sage. Directly before him and low on the horizon glowed a great white star.

Reaching the top of the ascent, Jennings paused to listen and glance back. No one was following; apparently his departure had been unheeded. With a grunt of relief, Jennings headed down the opposite side of the grade.

He had gone a scant fifty yards when again he halted—this time with a sharp intake of the breath. Out of a clump of stunted trees had suddenly ridden a man. The fellow came directly toward him; in the faint light, Jennings could catch the reflection of a star pinned to the newcomer's shirt front.

"Where are you going?" The question was asked in a level, accusing voice. Desperation lent the weak youth courage, and with remarkable coolness he answered:

"I'm leaving town. Too much excitement to suit——"

"Sorry," the other cut in, "but we ain't allowing any one to leave town just now. You'll have to go back!"

Twice his attempt to escape had been nipped in the bud! Jennings turned slowly, that sick feeling again upon him. He knew now that he was being watched. The sheriff hadn't believed that story of his. If they should find the body——

But that wouldn't make things any worse for him, he realized. According to his story, it wouldn't be surprising if those bandits had killed old Beezer Duncan; and unless the authorities could prove that in some detail he had lied, they would be helpless.

Phil Jennings made his way slowly back to town, and paced down the deserted Main Street. He halted at last, with the railroad tracks stretching off in either direction before him. A pale moon had swung into the sky. Jennings stared keenly up and down the railroad. Perhaps they had neglected to guard this way out of town.

He headed down the ties; but he had hardly gone two hundred yards when a couple of armed men stepped out of some underbrush. For the second time within half an hour he was turned back into town.

Defeated again, the young fellow began to walk toward the boarding house. He was positive now that the authorities suspected him; there could be no other interpretation of this surveillance. If they had believed his story they wouldn't be watching him; they would be out scouring the desert for some trace of the bandits.

And suddenly Jennings realized that that was where he had slipped up. He had forgotten that these desert folk were many of them expert at reading signs; and when they got to Duncan's place and found no tracks to corroborate his story, they had decided that he lied. Or perhaps they had guessed the truth from the tracks in the earth! It was not impossible——

His heart was thudding fiercely; he could feel the pulse in his throat, his lips, his temples.

"I got to find out what they're up to," he mumbled hoarsely. "I wonder——"

He remembered now that his room at the boarding house was directly over the sheriff's office. That offered him his chance, he saw. He could drill a hole through the floor and hear every word that was said in the apartment below. As he approached the building, the only two-story one in town, he saw that a light glowed inside the sheriff's office.

He hurried to his room. The floor creaked under his tread, but he didn't notice that; for now Jennings could hear

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voices coming up through the boards. Directly below him, Sheriff Ted Raines and some of his men were holding a conference, undoubtedly about his case. What were they saying?

Jennings crawled under his bed, drew his pocketknife, and began slowly and very carefully to cut a small hole in the flooring. He had to exercise the utmost caution lest he make a noise that would be audible below; but half an hour later he had finished his job, apparently without arousing suspicion. He had cut a little round aperture in the floor, perhaps a half an inch across. On the springs of the bed above him a tiny spot of yellow light glowed.

Jennings flattened himself on the floor and pressed one ear to the hole. The first words spoken made him start.

"Most likely he *did* lie!" came the voice of Sheriff Ted Raines. "But that ain't the question, Dave. The fact remains that we ain't found pore old Beezer's body; and whether the bandits killed him, as Jennings says, or whether he done it himself, it's certain sure the murderer hid the corpse where we ain't going to locate it without a lot of trouble. Unless, of course, them bandits kidnaped him. That's possible, although according to the tracks the bandits are only part of the boy's fairy story. Living or dead, though, we got to have Beezer before we can tell definitelike what happened. I——"

"But the thing that gets me is that we ain't seen any buzzards out there," came another voice. "You boys all know how them critters are—they can spot a body anywhere, unless it's buried an' covered with earth. If Beezer was dead around there, they'd be flocking thick. As it is, all the buzzards in the county has gathered over at that dead hoss down in Jackknife Canyon."

There was a long silence. Finally the spy heard a chair scrape, and a man got to his feet.

"I'm goin' home an' to bed," announced a surly voice. "You bozos won't get nowhere by sittin' around an' jawin'. I think we'd ought to hang young Jennings right now; and ride out to-morrow and have another look around."

"We'll have the look, all right," said Sheriff Raines. "But there won't be no hanging that ain't legal, and don't you ever forget that. All right, boys—remember, we ride in the morning."

They shuffled from the office, and after a time Phil Jennings crawled from under the bed. His hands trembled so that he spilled half the tobacco when he tried to roll a cigarette. One thing he had learned, however, and that was that he was safe—until they found the body. For the present, he had nothing to fear. He blew out the kerosene lamp, went to bed, and, in spite of the harrowing twenty-four hours he had gone through, promptly fell asleep. He did not waken the following morning until the sunlight was creeping through the window.

As he breakfasted at the little restaurant across the way, he saw half a dozen stalwart mounted men gathered before the sheriff's office. A moment later Raines came out. Jennings watched them ride away with an uneasy feeling. Upon the activities of those seven grim-faced men his whole fate hung. His appetite was gone, and he soon paid his bill, and went into the street.

That morning was a long one for the youth. It seemed a year before the clock in the lobby of the little hotel struck noon. Jennings strolled down to the railroad station. He didn't know whether the trail and the tracks were still watched; but in broad daylight he realized he wouldn't get far.

It was midafternoon when, peering across the desert, the bandit glimpsed a cloud of dust. Instinctively he divined

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that this was caused by the sheriff and his men coming back; he decided that they would hold their parley in the office—that is, unless they came for him, in which case he was doomed. He went to his room and when the posse had ridden to a halt before Raines' office, Jennings crawled under the bed and applied his ear to the hole in the floor.

"Well, boys, it begins to look as if they had kidnaped the old man," Sheriff Raines rumbled, and Jennings knew that they had not found the body. "I tell you, it's got me plumb worried. It sure looks as if the kid lied; and yet he couldn't have lugged the body far if he was the murderer. My idea is, it's somewhere around the oasis."

Jennings' heard began to thump, and he pressed his ear tighter against the little hole. After a moment's silence, broken only by the snap of a match, a heavy voice boomed;

"I reckon yo're right, Ted. And it occurs to me that there's one place we didn't look—leastways, I didn't! You remember that old prospect hole, over at the other end of the oasis? Pretty well hid by brush, and it would be just the place to dump the body——"

Jennings' face had paled, and his hands clenched until the knuckles showed white. This was the beginning of the end. Now they would ride out there, look in the old shaft, and——

He caught his breath with a sharp intake, as Sheriff Ted Raines' answer came to him.

"Forget it. I looked there the first thing. Not a sign of the body. And we've poked in every hollow and every abandoned shaft within a mile."

Jennings crawled from under the bed. The conference went on below, but he had heard enough. It was impossible—and yet it must be true! He had thrown the body down that old prospect hole; and Raines, looking there, had not seen it. Therefore, either some one had removed it, or it had removed itself.

Another possibility came to him. There was a chance that there had been two shafts and that Raines had not looked into the right one. In that case, the body might still be where he had left it.

"I got to know!" Jennings said to himself. "There's no other way but for me to make another trip out there. I'd rather be shot; but I'll go crazy if I don't find out the truth."

He made his way to the livery stable and saddled the mule on which he had come into town following his encounter with old Duncan. The stableman was curious and a little suspicious; but Jennings paid him and rode off. He didn't stop to realize that he might be followed; he only wanted to see for himself whether the body was where he had thrown it.

The sun grazed the desert and began to disappear. In the lee of each cactus or scrub sage sprawled an endless black shadow, the somber outline of himself and his mule was visible ahead as far as he could see. The red light grew thin and unreal; lingered a moment, like the flame of a candle exposed to a sudden wind, and was gone. Twilight began to thicken over the desert and the far hills.

Left to himself. Jennings would soon have lost his way; but the mule apparently realized that it was going home for it stuck to the trail hour after hour, although the youth made no attempt to guide it. Jennings dozen in the saddle. The moon now lighted the wild land on every side with its pale-gold illumination. Once more the young man slept; and when he awoke the sky had grown gray with the coming of dawn.

It was still dark when he arrived at the hut, which he and Duncan had shared for a few hours. Jennings

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swung down out of the saddle. The eerie light and the silence combined to make the task before him singularly unpleasant; but, whatever the cost, he must know. Drawing his gun, he hurried along the trail that wound through the thick undergrowth of the oasis.

He passed the rock-incrusted spring; now he could see the willows, hidden among which was the shaft. It required all his will power to force himself ahead; but he crept on. He reached the edge of the willows, halted, and listened. Only the muffled pound of his own heart rewarded him. With something between a sob and a curse, Jennings began to claw his way into the brush.

He reached the edge of the shaft and peered over. He remembered distinctly that Duncan's face had been visible, a white blur turned upward; now he couldn't see it. Still, he fancied there was a sprawled black thing down there —although it might be only a fallen log. He must know, he told himself, once and for all.

He hurried to the shack and found a short length of rope. With this he returned to the prospect hole. He tied one end of the rope securely about the trunk of a willow, the other end about his waist. Then, nerving himself for the ordeal, he approached the edge of the depression—and slid over the margin.

The rope burned his hands, and he fell the last four feet. He was breathing like one who has run far. Slowly, unwillingly, he turned. He had been right; this was the old man's body. Only now the face was hidden—and Duncan was kneeling——

A shriek escaped the youth's lips. *For the thing at his feet had moved.* A horrible yell that was not his echoed through the silence, and the man he had murdered got suddenly erect. Jennings was aware of a pair of strong arms that encircled him; a white, bloodless face close to his. The shock had been too much; Jennings had fainted.

When he recovered consciousness, he realized that he had been hauled from the shaft; sunlight tinged the leaves of the willows above him. Next instant he saw that men were all about him—grim-faced men, who nevertheless eyed him with something akin to pity. Sheriff Ted Raines was there; and close beside him was old Beezer Duncan, looking rather grimy, but otherwise much as usual.

"I thought I killed you," Jennings mumbled, staring at the older man.

After a moment of silence, Sheriff Raines spoke.

"Then it was you that landed Beezer over the head and dumped him down here?"

Jennings nodded weakly, and Raines continued:

"That's what we been trying to find out. You see, you told such a good story that we couldn't make sure if you lied or not. Beezer here was hit from behind, and he never saw who hit him. After you had gone, he come to, managed to haul himself out of that hole, saddled a mule, and came straight to me. We finally agreed to play yore own game. We had to make you confess. So I had the landlord put you in the room over my office; I knew you'd cut a hole through the floor, just like you done, and listen. And we figured that when I let you know we had looked here and hadn't found the body, you'd come out on the gallop and see for yourself. Beezer was watching for you; long before you saw him, he came over here and got back where you had put him.

"You know the rest. You had to climb down to be sure he was there, and he grabbed you. I reckon you had the thrill of a lifetime!"

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The Colorado River

By Marshal South

LET poets sing the gentle spell of purling brook and ferny dell,
And rivers soft with sweet romance, where quivering moonbeams love to dance.
Just so, let them sing on.

I take my pen with different spell: a river turbulent as hell—
A river whose thick swirling flood is dyed a chocolate hue with mud,
Upon whose tide go whirling down the drifting logs past Yuma town,
Whose boiling eddies suck and churn; whose brooding spirit, dark and stern,
Dreams on of cities turned to dust; of cliff-built dwellings where are thrust
Beneath the crumbling ruin's silt, the mummied forms of those who built.

The mummied forms and perished hands of those who through the arid lands
Built, dwelt, and passed—who shall say where? Their voices on the desert air
Are stilled these thousand years. And yet, the turgid waters onward fret,
Fretting their banks and bearing down their load of silt past Yuma town.
Savage and grim, untamed and free, the muddy flood that dammed a sea
And turned aside to let it die, and when the sun had sucked it dry
Rolled past in sullen glee to mock the sun-scorched buttes of sea-bed rock,
Biding its time to reft and span and wreck the future works of man.

Tamed, do you say? Hark to the mock the silent record of the rock
Bears to your boast. The feet pass by; the river rolls beneath the sky.
Ten thousand years—a fleeting breath—what knows this savage flood of death,
Save of the death of those whose pride built cities by its rolling tide?
Cities! Where are they? Ask the dust that cakes the cracking mudflat's crust.
Cliff dwellers? Aye, but who before? Ask of the sullen water's roar,
Grinding to dust each tiny trace of many another buried race.

Conquistadores—the Dons—you say? Yes, yes—*that* happened *yesterday.*
And others yet, more recent still, leaving their bones by wash and hill,
Seeking for gold. Their feet have passed and yet again there come these last
Who plant anew their squash and corn, holding the ancient flood in scorn,
Who plan and plot with skill and stealth to rob the river of its wealth.
Just so. Dream on!

Build dams across the savage tide, dig deep your channels strong and wide;
Build empires on the desert floor. *So built they who were there before.*
Dream on! The logs go bobbing down; the silt swirls thick past Yuma town;
The desert sandstorms drift and fly; the feet depart; the cities die.
Ten thousands years—still to the south the churning waters seek their mouth.
Where are the dams that checked the flow? And Yuma—where did Yuma go?
Dust and the silent desert day. Yuma? Ah, that was *yesterday.*

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Very Wild Honey

By Austin Hall
Author of "Rolling Stone," etc.

THE trouble with trouble is that it has a propensity for popping up in bundles, hitting you when you don't expect it, and starting you off on some new tangent. Yet, all in all, it works out from natural laws, beginning with some quirk or sequence and eventually winding up in some logical corner. That is, it will, if you take the thing by the throat and throw it where it belongs.

Old John Harper Adams, tamer of bears, prospector and trapper—and, on top of that, one of Sheriff Byrnnes' special deputies—had forgotten all about such a thing as that. In fact, he was enjoying about as serene a contentment as ever comes to a man of the deep forest. All morning he had been reading, his feet propped on an old stool, with the fireplace blazing forth the comfort that radiates from a good pine knot sizzling and popping in strange contrast to the feathery silence that shrouded the outside of the cabin, where the snow, slithering down, added each moment to the promise of a mountain level. It was the first snow, and John was ready. He had seen his old pet, Silvertip, after a season of bearish pranks, hole up for his winter's hibernation; and now there was nothing to do but oil the traps and make ready for the winter's routine. A few books and comfort while the snow was getting set. And after that——

"Yahoo! Yahoo! Yippy! Yip!"

A call came out of the storm from the opposite side of the canyon. And that's the way the trouble started.

Old John Adams had pricked up an ear, closed the book, and removed his feet from the stool. The call might have been from a coyote, an animal, or a man. John did not know. So he waited for it to be repeated; then, to make sure, he opened the door and looked out into a fluttering curtain of falling snow. The sky was blurred and feathery, and it was impossible to dis-

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tinguish beyond the snow-tipped pines that bordered the flat. With his pipe in his hand the old man listened.

"Dog-gone!" he muttered. "That was a funny yell. If it was an animal, it was a new one to me; only it might 'a' been the way I heard it. And if he's a man, he ain't nothin' less than a lunatic. No, sir, he ain't. Either that or he's drunk and as crazy as a loon—which is all the same thing anyway. They ain't no livin' man in the world who'd be walking through a snowstorm like this, if he had his senses. Yep! Hello! There he goes again."

"Yahoo! Yip!" came the raucous voice. "It's me! I'm a-comin', John Adams, an' don't you ferget! Yep! And I'm the toughest hombre that ever hit the Siskiyous. Yahoo!"

Old John reached behind him and then turned back toward the door again.

"Oh, I see." He spoke simply enough. "Yo're a tough one, be ye? Well, if yo're that bad, you sure enough have got a right to brag about it, because I've seen some almighty wild ones in these here ole mountains. But most likely you're just crazy."

The voice was coming now from the icy stream at the bottom of the canyon, and for a few minutes it ceased altogether. Silence again. Then suddenly, like a shadow, a form hulked out of the storm—a ponderous figure, snow covered, ghostlike, holding up one arm in premeditated challenge. And in that hand was a bottle of yellowish liquid, proclaiming the fact that John was in for a drunken caller. That fact, more than any other, caused John to drop the .45 into the holster behind the door.

"'Yaller-face Bill!'" He spoke disgustedly. "I might 'a' known it was some fool like that. Now I guess we're in for a pleasant afternoon."

The old man's words brought the other to a halt; apparently the fellow had not realized until then that he was in close proximity to the cabin. He reeled drunkenly.

"Yah!" he called belligerently. "Well, I'm here. Yaller-face Bill! And I'm bad all over. You want tuh fight? You danged revenuer!"

John Harper Adams was anything but a revenue officer; and all the world knew it. Furthermore, he had no intention of gratifying a drunken man by accepting his quarrel. Wherefore, he gave a soft answer.

"Well, well, Yaller Face." He spoke kindly. "It looks to me like you been imbibing. But you ain't as bad as you look. You just think yo're bad. That's all."

But by this time the big renegade had got up close. To any one but John Adams he would have looked doubly ominous.

"Is that so?" he blurted. "Well, I'm so bad that I eat a pine tree every morning fer breakfast. Yah! And I kin lick any man in the Siskiyous. Yiiiip! You're one of Sheriff Byrnnes' deputies. Well, I'm a-tellin' yuh, John Adams, that yuh can't put nothin' over on Yaller-face Bill. Yuh been a-runnin' these here mountains long enough. I've come down to give yuh the thrashing of your life."

Swinging his hands for all the world like an animated windmill, he stood before John Adams. The old man, leaning in the doorway, was a trifle careless. One of Yaller Face's arms performed a parabolic curve and landed around John's neck, catching him by the collar and yanking him down to the ground.

"Yah!" sounded Yaller Face's voice. And the battle was on.

But Old John, for all his age, was a scrapper of many schools. Over and over they rolled in the snow with the old man employing a little bit of catch-as-catch-can, Græco-Roman, Jujutsu, Lumberjack, and Marquis of Queens-

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berry. Feet swinging, bodies rolling—and grunts! Head over heels across the flat they went like a pair of throttling bumblebees.

"Why, you durned old horned toad," sounded John's irate voice. "You will, eh? Durn ye! Let go of my whiskers!"

Simultaneously he drove in with a knockout punch. At the same moment something thudded against his own chin. Then all the world disappeared. When he came to, he was lying in serene solitude with his face buried in the snow. A hunk of his whiskers had been torn out, but beyond that he was alive and ready to start all over again. Only there was no one to start with—just the snow flakes and the open door in front of him. So he crawled on his hands and knees to the safety of the cabin and pulled down the discarded .45.

"Of all the danged ornery fools!" he muttered. "The next time I put my gun away, I want some one to tell me about it. Whew! But that was a scrap!" He surveyed himself in the glass. "Jus' the same old boy, you still got a kick in your wallop yet. I must have knocked him out and he come to first. That feller ain't around here—not in the cabin, and not out there. I wonder where he went. And a whole gob of whiskers gone out of my chin. He'll pay, dang him, he'll pay for it! Just you see if he don't!"

But a search of the locality failed to reveal any further trace of his assailant. Apparently, Yaller Face had followed some perversion of drunken tendency and drifted out into the storm again. After he had made sure of that fact, Old John settled down to take care of his bedraggled whiskers, combing them out and smearing the vacant space with a copious covering of goose grease; but all day long his thoughts were of a red-topped variety that boded no great benevolence toward his drunken caller.

The storm lasted three days longer. When it had abated, Old John took the notion to ski over to the railroad after a few more provisions. Once in town, force of habit led him in the direction of the office of Sheriff Byrnnes. There he discovered the genial officer with his feet cocked up on a table. From his half-tilted chair the sheriff popped a question that jolted John to his boot tips.

"Seen Yaller Face lately?"

John blinked. He had a whole lot to say himself, but the sheriff was saying it for him.

"Yaller Face? I dunno. W'at's he done?"

John had turned the question backward.

"Well," said Sheriff Byrnnes indirectly. "He ain't done nothin' incriminatin', John. Leastways, that's what I think. But he's strongly suspected of making a new kind of dynamite. Runnin' a still or something like that. And he's sure raisin' heck up in them mountains back of you. I ain't so devilish against a little hard stuff myself, because I'm an old-timer, you know, and there was onct a time when I liked a little nip along with the best of them. But this stuff is explosive. No mistake. And there's bad fellers up among them heights. They're hard enough when they're sober, but when they're filled up on this T N T, I ain't got no way o' tellin' what they'll do."

John took a chair; things were breaking rather suddenly, and he was beginning to suspect that Yaller Face had been in town.

"Well, why don't you arrest Yaller Face?" he asked. "If he's got a still why don't you bust it up?"

The sheriff hunted up a strong cigar, passed its companion over to John, and lit up.

"That's just it," he snapped back dis-

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gustedly. "Mebbe he ain't got a still. Because a man's been drunk ain't no sign that he's making booze. Besides, I've investigated. Old man Bowers, who runs the store over here, is an expert distillery man. Used to work at it years ago. He says you'd have to have sugar to manufacture liquor like that. And Yaller Face ain't never bought no sugar. Neither has any come in on the railroad, except what went to the store. And on top of that, accordin' to the laws of this State, I ain't got no right to arrest him. He ain't never committed no felony, and the law says that this prohibition violation is only a misdemeanor. You see, it's a funny law, John. The lawyers who made it must have got to fightin' among themselves, or mebbe wanted a little shot, and so they slipped in a joker. You'd think it would be the sheriffs of the State who would do the enforcing; but instead it's the district attorneys, or a revenue officer. The district attorney must first send out a man to collect the evidence, and he can't enter a private residence without a search warrant that's backed by good and sufficient proof. Then, on top of that, he's the district attorney and usually so busy prosecuting that he has no time for police work. I, as sheriff, don't come in until the attorney takes a notion, and then it's up to me to go out and get the man. That's the way the enforcement act works in this State. It's just something that isn't."

"Well, what's Yaller Face done then?"

"Plenty," spoke the sheriff. "I'll say he's done plenty. But it wasn't nothin' I could arrest him for. He just landed here the other day, and right away this old town began to cut up capers. It was rumored that one of the boys stole a pint bottle out of his pocket, and it was so good that right after he drank it he started down the track to shoot it out with a locomotive. Yep! He was standing right in the middle of the track—both guns drawn—ready to shoot it out with that big flyer. If one of the boys hadn't run down and throwed a rope over his neck that engine would have tossed him over Black Mountain. I picked up Yaller Face, but he didn't have any of the stuff on him at the time; and you know these boys up here ain't a-going to squeal on the man who gives them their liquor. Besides, that cowboy was so drunk he couldn't talk; and when he sobered up, he wouldn't. I had to let Yaller Face go. By the way, John, what happened to your whiskers? What's the matter with your face?"

And that brought John up with a jump; he always was particular about personal remarks.

"Nothing!" he snapped. "I bit myself. That's all."

"Oh, excuse me," said the sheriff, his voice rising. "No offense, John. Well, if you should see Yaller Face, John, hang onto him and give him my compliments."

"Yeh?" said John, walking, to the door. "I tried to hang onto him the last time. Only he wouldn't let me."

That concluded the conference, but as he was going down the steps, John heard the sheriff mumbling to himself:

"Dog-gone it! I wonder what the old fellow meant by that. Yaller-face Bill. I wonder?"

Neither had the old prospector heard the last of Yaller Face. Somehow the promiscuous mountaineer had spread himself all over the landscape. John had purchased his provisions and was skiing about three miles out of town when, coming around a bend, he ran plump into an old man plodding down the trail. The old fellow was torn and bleeding, his coat was ripped, and his hat minus the crown; altogether he looked as though he had had experience with a buzz saw. When he saw John, he began cursing the sun,

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moon, and stars; waving both arms. Also the old man had had a hunk of whiskers torn out of his face. John slowed up and began caressing his own sore spot.

"Hello, stranger," he greeted. "Something happen? Looks to me like you and me belong to the same club. Must be you was talking to Yaller-face Bill."

And that brought forth the eruption.

"Yaller-face Bill! Yaller-face Bill! Say," yelled the old man. "My name is 'Arizona Tommy.' And they ain't no man on earth who kin insult me and live. No, sir, they ain't! I ain't never took no dirt from any man dead or alive. But I guess I took it just now. I been up in these parts on a visit to my nephew, and was out after a little game, and had run all out of ammunition. And, on my way back, here comes a big leather-face rough neck offn the bank right on top of me. Said I was a revenuer, and that he was going to tear me apart. Me! A revenuer, mind you! And we rolled over and over, and I almost got killed, because he jumped on top of me before I had a chanct. A revenuer! Me! Well, I wasn't no revenuer then; but I'll be one dog-gone soon. I'm a-goin' right down to Frisco and get sworn in; and then I'm a-coming back and there'll be hell a-popping. Yessir! And if I don't, you kin tell the world that Arizona Tommy has gone to digesting mud."

"Phew!" said Old John when the other had trotted out of sight. "Wasn't he mad, though. And I half believe he meant it. Well, Yaller Face, all I kin say is that you're sure digging a good deep grave."

But apparently Yaller Face had not finished with his spading. When John arrived at his cabin, he discovered that he had had a visitor—none other than Yaller Face. The man had come in and placed a note on the table. John read:

JOHN HARPER ADAMS: You ben down to the sheruff to squeal eh. Well it wont do you noo good, and if I ever get you up in my country, I'm goin skinn you alive.

Signed

YALLER FACE BILL.

Postt scriptt Keep yer ole mouth shutt.

Yaller Face agin.

Old John was angry at the moment; but the succeeding days brought no more of the tumultuous Yaller face, and so the edge of the affair gradually wore off. The snow set in deep, and the trapping was unusually fine; so much so that when spring broke, John had accumulated one of the finest strings of furs he had ever seen. The days became long again; the thaws started; and down along the banks the pussy willows began sprouting. And then one day, just when the twigs were at the proper freshness, a huge hulk emerged from the hibernation tunnel and walked out of the mine shaft. John was packing his last hide when he looked down and saw the tender-footed grizzly gazing out at the world from his long sleep.

"Dog-gone!" he muttered. "It's old Silvertip woke up at last. Say, you ole rascal you! You're pretty clever, ain't you? Here I been a-plugging over the hills all winter freezing to death, and you been a laying up in your bed all comfortable and cozy. A wise ole head you've got. I'll say. When the world is all sunshine and full of roses, you're willing to meet it; but when the winter comes and it gets hard picking, you just back off."

Old Silvertip blinked at the sun and paid not the slightest attention to the old man on the other bank. Ten minutes later, John watched him walking gingerly on his tender new soles to a clump of willows beside the river where he would get his first drink and a few pussy tips to soothe out his shriveled stomach. The old miner knew that for several days he would see but little of his old bear, and that the big fellow

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would spread out on the sand to soften the stiffness of his long hibernation. Each spring it had been the same, until John knew the ritual. On the third day, the old man went out with his gun after cottontail.

"Got to have that stew," he announced solemnly. "And it's a-going to be a dandy this year. You bet. Seems like old times to have him dig out of his hole and go knocking around the woods."

The stew was a bear concoction, pure and simple: rabbits, two quarts of wild honey, willow tips, greens, and garlics —enough to odorize the hills for a mile around. Before it was half cooked, the big bruin was up at the cabin waiting for his annual breakfast. Old John patted his pal on the head and nodded sagely.

"Silvertip, old boy! You and me has had a heck of experiences, ain't we? And mebbe we'll have a heck of a lot more. So long as I've got you hanging around in the brush, I've got reenforcements. Hey? Well, you're an ole rascal even at that."

It did the old man good to watch the big fellow eat; whole iron kettle crammed to the top. When the meal was over, Silvertip lay down for his usual rub; whereupon Old John fetched out a stool and tickled him on the stomach.

"Dog-gone it," he said. "It ain't such a bad world, after all. Not as long as I've got Silvertip. But I suppose now in a few days, he'll be hitting it off for the hills looking for adventure."

And that, apparently, was just what Silvertip proceeded to do. Four days later Old John woke up to discover that his pet had departed on a pilgrimage. That is, he might have gone; for John realized that he might be hanging around in the woods almost any place. Six weeks went by and then one day the old man happened to stop at the river. He held his hand in the water.

"Getting warm," said he, "but it'll be cool up around the high spots. The snow's a-melting fast, and that'll set the trout to leaping. I ought to be up there after a little sport, and I think I'll go."

Three hours later, he was miles up the trail; and next day he had reached the snow, where he proposed to cross the summit and descend to the wonderful streams on the other side. Also it was Silvertip's favorite playground during early June and there was a chance to have some fun. John climbed and camped at the foot of a great snow pile, waiting and hoping that he would be rewarded even as he had been before. And sure enough, along about noon, he beheld the lonesome old bear cut across the face of the mountain, climb slowly to the crest, and then look around over the landscape. Apparently he had not seen Old John, or, if he had, he did not let on. But the discovery came a few minutes later. The bear walked to a steep part, knocked off a hunk of snow, and then suddenly let go. A flurry of white mist, bear's fur, and commotion all tobogganing down toward John Harper Adams. Straight as a bullet! The bear landed at the foot and began whirling around in a joyous circle.

"Pip!" called the old man. "That's fun, ain't it? I was sure that I'd find you."

All afternoon the man and the bear played; and next morning John picked up his traps and crossed over the top. The bear followed, more out of whim than anything else. Good old summertime: the scent of the forest, the firs and the aspens and the alders along the creek banks. The bear was walking ahead. But as they were coming down a wooded canyon, John saw him stop, sniff, and suddenly disappear into a thicket of buck brush.

"That's funny," said Old John. "Mebbe he's a-going back. Well, I

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don't blame him. If I could get that much fun out of a snow bank, I'd do it myself."

But he was to learn a whole lot more in another hour. He was walking along a deep cut when, without a speck of warning, a yell came from the bank above him, followed by a weight crashing on top of his head and smashing him to the earth. Old John was knocked into seven kinds of unconsciousness; and when he came to, he was looking straight up into the leering features of Yaller-face Bill.

"You will, eh?" roared the other. "Pretending you was on a fishing trip, eh? Well, I know what you was after. So I laid fer you."

John was in a place where he could say nothing; he was too far gone. Yaller Face continued:

"This has been a good day fer revenuers. You're the second one I've got. Well, you're goin' tuh learn something fancy—the both of you."

Bill had appropriated both of John's guns; so, for the time being, there was nothing the old man could do but take his medicine. Just the same, he wondered who the other captive might be. Also he realized, from the manner in which he was being roped, that Yaller Face knew his business. Without a word he watched the big villain lead a mule out of the brush and bring it alongside. In another moment John found himself trussed up and going along an unknown trail. Half an hour later he saw where they were headed for—a cabin on top of a thirty-foot bluff, with the river splashing along the base. Back of the building was a dense wood running sheer to the top of the ridge. The mule humped along, almost breaking John's back, but making time, nevertheless. When they had reached the top of the bluff, Yaller Face came back, cut a strap, and let John fall to the ground. Then he kicked him. The kick was what made Old John mad.

"Look here, Yaller Face," he said. "You're going just a bit too far. That's me that you're kicking."

But instead of answering, the big fellow rolled him like a log over next to the cabin. And then John realized that he was not the only unfortunate, for there on the ground, trussed even as himself, was a white-whiskered man, mumbling cuss words at the ground below him. And the man was none other than Arizona Tommy. The two old fellows lay blinking; but John shook his head for silence.

"Thar now," spoke Yaller Face. "You two revenuers kin enjoy yourselves. I'm a-goin' in after a little drink. Then I'll come out and do the fancy work."

He had hardly gone, when old Arizona Tommy began breathing his imprecation.

"You bet I'm a revenuer," he announced, "and I'm a-goin' to get him. You wait and see. But that feller has sure enough got my number. Caught me this time just like he did the other. Jumped off a bank, and I didn't have a chance. Just the same I ain't alone. I was a-coming in one way and the sheriff was headin' in the other. If we kin stave him off we'll have Sheriff Byrnnes here to help us. And then we kin find his still and have him dead to rights."

That sounded better. Besides, John knew that Silvertip might have taken a notion to pick up the trail. Perhaps it was Yaller Face who had caused him to scamper into the brush. In that case—but just then out came the renegade with a bottle of whisky and some rope.

"Now, then," he said, "I'm a-going to show you what I do to revenuers. See? First I take them like this and shoulder 'em up agin' the wall. See?"

He yanked Old John's sore body straight against the cabin; then without a word he began tying him to some heavy spikes driven into the boards.

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In another moment the helpless old man found himself sticking like a skin against a plank, unable to move. Arizona Tommy was next, cursing and spitting fire into the villain's face. But he was tied like the other.

"Shut up," roared Bill, when he had thrown the last knot. "If you didn't want this, why did you come up? I'm a-going to show you something nice."

Whereupon he backed off until he was at the edge of the bluff, selected a stool, and picked up his .45s and a bottle of whisky. He took a long gurgling drink. Then he took another. After that his smile became broader and more leering.

"Fine stuff," he announced. "Well, you sure are a fine pair of birds. Only you need a hair cut. Yep. You need it bad. And I'm the little boy that's a-goin' tuh give it tuh you. Only this here hair cut is a-going tuh be scientific. See? First I'll start in on old Arizona's whiskers. They're a little bit scraggly around the ears."

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He had scooped up one of the .45s and let go straight at the hair around the old fellow's face, driving the stray whiskers into the boards and not missing his head by more than a fraction of an inch.

"Hey! You galloping galoot!" yelled the little man. "What you trying to do?"

Bang! Bang!

Two shots this time—one for Tommy and the other for Old John. The prospector shut his eyes and prayed for the quality of the whisky. He would have given a leg for either the sheriff or old Silvertip. This fellow didn't have a lick of sense. The big renegade had ceased firing to regard his marksmanship, and take another drink. And in the interval of silence John thought he had heard a noise. He listened, all the while looking down at the river slushing along at the foot of the bluff, following the course, until the silver stream was lost in the great mountain forest. *Zrrrrr! Zrrrreeer!* The noise came from the woods behind the cabin. Could it be Silvertip?

Yaller Face had drained one bottle and was starting in on another; evidently, he was having the time of his villainous life. Arizona Tommy was talking with all his might. John had no doubt but what the fellow would practice his marksmanship until he became tired of it and then finish off by killing them.

Bang! Bang! went the .45s. And on each occasion either John or Tommy lost a lock of whisker. But by this time Yaller Face was growing careless; he had continued shooting until he was almost out of shells.

Zzzzzzrrrrrrumph! came a strange racket behind the cabin. Silvertip! John was sure of it. He had made his plan, but he wanted to be prepared. One leap and he could grab the renegade and roll into the river. Only his plan was not to be. In fact, matters changed so suddenly that they took Old John completely by surprise.

Yaller Face was looking at his empty belt and was mumbling about returning to the cabin for more shells, when, out of the corner of his eye, Old John beheld a hulking figure wabbling around the corner of the cabin. Silvertip!

And Silvertip was drunk! Drunk as a lord! Reeling! And as happy as a sailor on a lark. First one way, then another, with a comical sideway swing. Had he been able to talk he would, without a doubt, have been saying "Whoopee!" The big bear had picked up a stick and was rolling it along, watching it hilariously. Then all of a sudden he glanced up and perceived the renegade. For a moment he stood still, watching out of his little twinkling eyes. At the same moment Yaller Face looked up and let out a yell. He was seeing things a-plenty! And he did not

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wait. Another yell, and he had leaped straight over the bluff and into the river. Old Silvertip must have thought it was all a game. Whoopee! He bounded to the bluff; jumped in behind Bill. Down below, John could see the splashing of water where the silver spray shot up against the bank. First a man and then a bear. Up came the man and right behind him old Silvertip!

Another yell!

The bear was having splendid fun. Over the rapids and into another pool. Down, down, with the man screaming and the bear ducking him whenever he came up. Simultaneously a new figure appeared out of the woods down below and John recognized the sheriff.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned," spoke Arizona Tommy. "What do you know about that!"

"A lot," answered the amused John. "That's old Silvertip, my pet bear. He ain't never failed me yet. He must have got drunk and then come out. Must have found that still. Now watch me work myself loose. That last shot cut one of these here ropes."

Ten minutes later, Old John was in the cabin hunting for a gun; when he came out he met Tommy trotting down from the woods.

"Hey, Adams!" he yelled. "You was right. That old bear found the still just as you said. He got everything all mixed and then he helped himself. And I know what brought him to it. And I know, too, why old Yaller Face never bought any sugar. He's been making honey whisky. Using honey for sugar. Wild honey. It was that that attracted the bear. He busted in and turned some honey into the other stuff and then fairly gorged himself."

In another half hour Sheriff Byrnnes arrived and heard their story. He had the renegade bound and ready for delivery at the jail. Then he burst out laughing again.

"And old Silvertip," he said, "is down there in the woods. And he's out on a toot. Poor old Silver!"

ARCHERY FOR BIG-GAME HUNTING

THERE is a tendency nowadays to give wild animals a sporting chance at the hands of the huntsman. In pursuance of this idea, some Western organizations are taking up archery with a view to using bows and arrows in their big-game hunting, instead of the deadly rifles that are the favorite weapons of sportsmen who go out into the wilderness places of the West. One of these organizations is the Long Bow Club, of Moscow, Idaho, founded by Doctor E. E. Hubert, of the forestry department of the University of Idaho. This club began by using a twenty-eight-pound bow. For those unfamiliar with archery, it may be well to explain that the strength of a bow is estimated by the number of pounds required to draw the string the full length of the arrow. The twenty-eight-pound bow was gradually increased in strength as the members grew more proficient and able to handle a bow of greater power. By the time the fall hunting season sets in, it is hoped to have all members using the seventy-pound bow. A bow of this size discharging steel-tipped arrows is powerful enough to bring down big-game animals, and yet the sporting chance for the hunted creatures is rather better than when a rifle is brought into action against them.

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Shining Sand

By Dwight Lee Wilson

SAND a-simmerin' an' sizzlin',
Wind so hot it burns yore breath,
Not a sign o' livin' creatures,
An' the valley's still as death.
Over in the west the Red Rocks
Stands like walls o' fire, too,
Jest a-prisonin' pore humans
Like the Injuns used tuh do.

Water's gettin' mighty skimpy
An' the grub is runnin' low,
But they's plenty in the cabin
That I cached a month ago.
'Bout another day'll make it,
Then I'll eat like any man,
(Jest as ev'ry desert camel
Takes its rations when it can.)

Shore my pack is wearin' heavy,
An' my eyes goes kind o' dim.
Fightin' back the big dust-devils
Sort o' saps an ol' man's vim.
But the sun an' sand ain't nothin'
When I feels that hefty pack,
For it's *shinin' sand* a-plenty
That I'm gonna carry back.

When the night comes cold an' chillin'
Then I piles the greasewood high,
So I has a fire a-blazin'
For tuh see my treasure by.
An' I wonders if the desert
Spreads its sand tuh sort o' hide
All the shinin' sand that's waitin'
If a man could see inside.

For the desert's always changin',
Hidin' trails o' yesterday,
Kind o' like it kept its secret
Jest by changin' that a way.
Desert sand is sly an' shiftin',
Turnin' hot an' turnin' cold,
But they's sand that's always shinin'—
"Shinin' sand" is desert gold.

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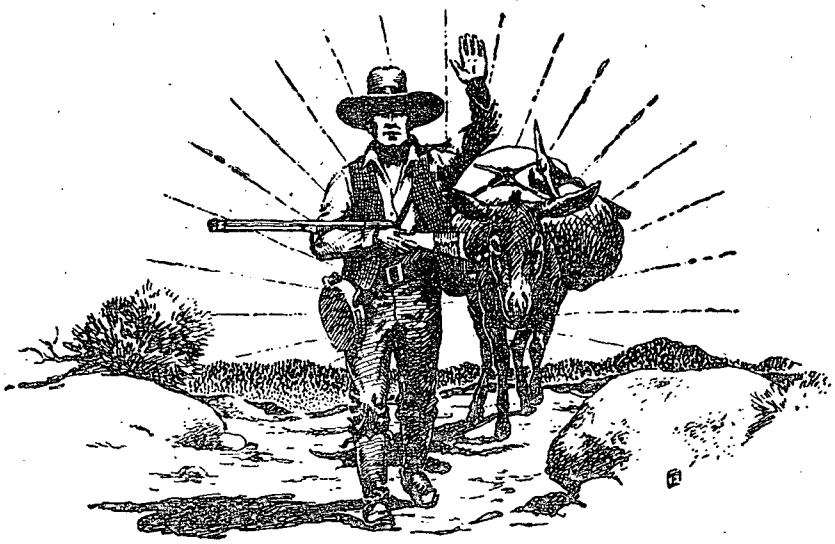

Miner's Potlatch

By J. A. Thompson

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE desires this department to be of real assistance to all who are interested in the practical side of mining. Questions pertaining to field conditions, mining equipment, mining territories, mining laws, prospecting and general geology will be answered.

Address all communications to J. A. Thompson, mining expert, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE question of where to look for minerals, asked frequently by Potlatch readers, is so broad and general that the answer must necessarily cover wide territories. In the mining zones of the West there are still large sections of country which remain but half explored. Notably, northeastern California, southern and central Idaho, parts of Oregon, northern Nevada, and a great deal of Alaska.

In Canada there is unbounded scope for the efforts of the pioneer prospector in Labrador, British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, the Hudson's Bay country, and in Manitoba. A vast territory is yet to be explored in the region of ancient rocks where the iron and copper of Lake Superior, the silver veins of Cobalt and the gold lodes of Porcupine and near-by districts have already been found. This region extends up into arctic Canada and by many authorities is considered probably the largest and most attractive territory for prospecting to be found anywhere in the world to-day. Moreover, it is a territory particularly favorable toward English-speaking people, the Canadian government allowing the same rights of location to Americans as to its own citizens.

The rapid extension of railways into the Hudson's Bay country and the increasing development of trapping and trade routes through this huge wilder-

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ness will, as time goes on, give the prospector easier access to this almost unknown part of North America.

Alaska is another territory of great mineral possibilities. Its chief drawbacks for the average prospector from the United States are the distance from home, and the fact that the open season is so short and the expense both of travel and of prospecting is comparatively high. Not so long ago syndicates used to make a practice of sending prospectors into the territory each spring to see what they could find. Apparently this custom has been largely abandoned during the past few years.

However, with the completion of the new railroad from Anchorage and Seward through the heart of the territory to Fairbanks, prospecting should be easier and less hazardous than it was in the old days.

Two ever-present objectives of the gold prospector are the "lost placers," or the undiscovered gold-bearing sediments which have been worn away from known lodes, and the veins from which rich placer grounds originally received their gold content. As an example of the first case, erosion of the gold veins in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada produced the famous placer deposits of the Yuba and American rivers. But where is the valuable débris produced by the wearing away of the gold-bearing rocks of northern Ontario? It has been suggested that this rich débris may some day be found imbedded under the clay which extends to James Bay.

Reversing the process, a similar question arises as to the location of the mother veins which contributed, through the gradual wearing away of their rock during long geological periods, to the formation of the fabulously rich placers found in the Klondike and its tributaries. Do they still exist, or were they entirely worn away by wind and weather in order to produce the gold-bearing gravels of Bonanza, Eldorado and other famous creeks?

Another possible source of a rich strike for the persevering prospector is in the untold mineral wealth that may lie buried under the ice and moss of the far North, or hidden under a heavy covering of glacial drift. The alkali crust of the desert and the lava of the bad lands in the United States may hide from the prospector many rich veins and lodes.

Still another opportunity for striking a bonanza looms up as an encouraging possibility for every prospector new to any specific field. Namely, the chance that rich ore bodies may have been passed up or overlooked by previous searchers due to poor observation or simply to bad mining. Many rich lodes that had been passed over and passed up for years by other prospectors, have been uncovered by a newcomer. Every large mining camp is full of such tales.

Despite the large areas still available for prospecting, it seems a pity that so many mines and mining sections are forced to remain idle by estates, heirs, railroads, and land-grant syndicates, who will neither work them nor sell them on reasonable terms and will not even allow prospecting to be done on their property.

To T. Y., Portland, Oregon: Some time ago was reported the construction of a small cyanide mill in Lidar Canyon, Hornsilver, Nevada. The mill, more or less an experiment on the part of C. M. Dawson, of Ely, and Andrew Ruf, of Goldfield, was supposed to have been completed and in operation by last February. It was built to handle the small custom trade in local ores.

To J. P. O., Calumet, Michigan: All reclamation work was discontinued at the Barnes-Hecker mine of the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company, Marquette

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Range, Michigan, several months ago. It was there that fifty-one miners lost their lives on November 3, 1926, and forty-one bodies remain entombed in the mines. The work of clearing the mine was considered too dangerous and contracting firms, accustomed to such work, refused to submit bids. In stopping the reclamation work, William C. Mather, president of the company, said: "The directors have reluctantly come to the conclusion that they ought not to attempt the reclamation of this mine with the great risk of losing additional lives of employees in an undertaking the ultimate success of which is exceedingly doubtful—— Immediately after the disaster instructions were given to accord especial financial assistance to the families of those who were lost—— This, of course, will also be applied to the family of William E. Hill, county mine inspector, who lost his life in this accident."

To J. V. J., Newport, Delaware: Regarding the occurrence of oil shales in North Carolina, recent reports on researches made by the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development state that large reserves of oil shale were revealed in the Deep River basin. This basin is near the geographical center of the State. The shales, which lie above the coal being mined at present, were indicated principally in the following three counties: Moore, Lee, and Chatham. From borings they were shown to have a thickness of from thirty-five to forty feet and to extend over a large area.

To N. L., Phœnix, Arizona: Gold mining, which has been at a low ebb in southwestern Oregon since the war, seems to have picked up a bit according to reports from various authentic sources. Some time ago it was said that there were still insufficient men for the work in progress. The wage scale quoted was five dollars for miners and six dollars for shift bosses. Engineering scouts for the large companies appeared in the district on the lookout for gold and copper properties of merit, according to one report. This would seem to indicate a general resumption of mining.

OIL-BOOM TOWNS AS LAWLESS AS GOLD CAMPS

THE lawlessness of the old-time gold camps of the West is rivaled nowadays by conditions prevailing in many of the oil-boom towns of Texas. One of the communities of this kind to break into the spotlight of notoriety by way of the public prints is Borger, Texas, an oil-boom town of the Panhandle. Borger has a record of which a gold camp of pioneer days might be proud. During one year, four peace officers were killed in the town, and there have been several persons shot to death in its dance halls and other resorts. It is a town that sprang up practically overnight in the middle of a rich oil field, with a population of fifteen thousand.

The conditions existing in Borger naturally attracted bandits, gunmen, and other hangers-on of the kind usually found in pioneer settlements where there are workers with plenty of ready money and a desire for hectic amusement to while away their leisure hours. One of the latest Borger outrages was the killing of two deputy sheriffs on a road near the town. Following this crime, ten members of the Texas rangers were sent to the boom town to establish law and order.

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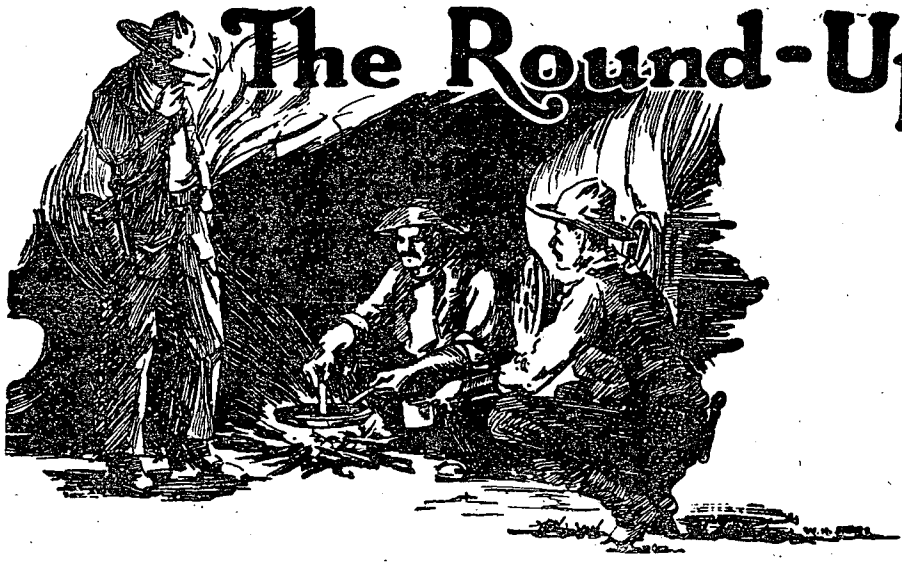
The Round-Up



LEFT, right! Left, right! It is Sergeant W. A. Bergman, 2438 No. Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. He has reached for his gun, he fires:

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: Noted the argument in the letter box about pistols. I have been a gun crank for thirty years, which is since I was able to grab a gun, and have used the two pistols mentioned by Mr. Reese. I consider the .45 automatic the best of the arms of this type, and the Luger and all others as a very poor bet. Few automatic pistols will work with any degree of reliability. Recently I asked a gun crank who works in a gun store where several thousand automatic pistols have been sold in the last five years what percentage of these arms worked. He estimated three per cent.

"About four out of five of the government model 'autos' will work. Some will work well with certain magazines, some with certain makes of cartridges, some will work only in the conventional shooting position, and not if they are pointed up or down, or tipped sideways. All of which doesn't indicate a weapon to choose if one expects to risk his life on its working right.

"Personally, I would choose for defensive purposes, a Colt New Service .44-40 or .45 Colt caliber. I consider this the most reliable arm in the world among modern weapons. Few shotguns or rifles are as absolutely dependable. For hunting, I would pick a .38 Colt or Smith & Wesson taking the .38 Special cartridge. This pistol will shoot a grouse or rabbit without tearing it to pieces, and will drill into the vitals of big game. A .44 or .45, of course, is better for the heavier stuff, but ninety-five per cent of shots will be at the small game. Also, a person who expects to get enough skill to use a revolver or auto pistol effectively, must practice, and that calls for a well-filled pocketbook if the shooter doesn't reload his empty shells. This, again, calls for a revolver, for the automatic throws out its empty shells, and many will be lost.

"A .38 Smith & Wesson Special, with a five-inch barrel, is the weapon that seems to work best for an all-around gun. It can be reloaded cheaply. Its full load is two-thirds as powerful as that of the very heaviest guns; it is extremely accurate, factories put up a great variety of loads in this shell for various purposes, even to a two-hundred-grain slug for a 'man-stopper' and

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cartridges can be bought wherever ammunition is sold.

"The .45 single-action is a good old-timer, but I would not recommend it, due to the lack of the very quality that is usually featured as its strong point—reliability. It is too heavy in .38-caliber and it is slow to operate, though fast for the first shot, in trained hands. The old-timers used it, of course, and did astounding work with it, but I think that, separating it from ts romantic glamour, a man will do better work with a double-action with the same amount of practice.

"One question is asked as to the outcome of a battle between a man armed with a single-action and a .45, presumably an automatic. Let me say that the battle would be won by the man who had the most sand and practice, other things being equal, which they wouldn't be very often. One usually shoots sooner than the other, even if he is not quicker. Lots of bad men made a reputation by shooting before the argument started, instead of afterward, or trying to. And no living human being can let any reasonably good shot 'go after' his gun, and expect to 'beat him to the draw' as our novels and movies are so fond of letting the hero do. It simply 'can't be did.' I have seen too much experimenting on this line. A split-second stop-watch held on two fast pistol shots, demonstrating with empty guns, would teach some of the story writers a lot.

"The .44 Remington revolvers are no longer made, but they were fine arms. I have one of the old cap-and-ball 'Rems,' and I never had a better shooter. I have an extra cylinder, and this enables one to refill it almost as quickly as an automatic pistol.

"Yes, a .30 Winchester may jam, but so may any other. There is a difference among arms of the same make, model, and caliber. Some are better than others, as I mentioned above. I have seen arms that jammed continually, and it seemed no one could cure them. A noted African hunter mentions a .405 Winchester doing this. Yet I never saw one of these arms jam —I have owned five and to look at one, it would look as though it couldn't jam. I have seen match Springfield rifles jam, fail to extract, drop their cartridges, and miss fire.

"I have held the highest scores made in the Illinois National Guard for the seasons of 1926-27, with the .45 'auto,' but if I had to choose an arm to defend myself with, I would take my .44-40 New Service, or a Colt or Smith & Wesson revolving pistol taking the .45 'auto' cartridge in half-moon clips, making reloading faster, thus doing away with about the only really weak point of the revolver—slow reloading. And I'd load my shells with lead bullets, so they'd give more shock than the copper-jacketed service cartridges. And I'd reload, and shoot, and shoot, and keep my hand in.

"Will be willing to answer questions, but please inclose a stamp."

Wes Burke, of Los Angeles, California, is now going to spout two verses of his favorite poem. Unfortunately, Wes doesn't know any more verses of this poem and he wants help. Can anybody here assist him?

"Wild"

"I'm wild and reckless,
  Was born in Texas,
Got three steel ribs and a wire backbone.
  With my foot in the stirrup
And my hand on the rein,
  I'm wild and reckless
And I can't be tamed.

"I'm wild and woolly
  And full of fun,
I ain't been licked
  'Cause it can't be done.
I'm an ole she-dog
  From Bitter Creek,
And it's my right to howl
  Yip-ee-ee."

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Can't class birds, we suppose, with wild animals, though they're wild enough to suit the most exacting; and we'll say this, that to many folks at least, birds are more interesting than four-legged animals. Also, there are mighty few of them that are dangerous, and the study of their ways is one of the most absorbing that one could take up. As you all know, there is an extremely interesting article every week in the magazine on "Birds of the West and North America." If W. J. House, of Gordo, Alabama, who is now about to speak, keeps his eye peeled for these articles, he will soon find one about the bird that gives him particular interest.

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Have been a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for a number of years, and think it is the greatest of all magazines. Frank Richardson Pierce is my favorite author. Let us hear some more from Joe Hardy and his lead dog, Tip.

"I would also appreciate information regarding wild geese. Will some of the gang living near where they winter or summer give me some information about them? All I know of them is that in early spring when the weather begins to get warm they fly over, going north in large flocks, generally in a V-formation. They do the same way in fall, going south. Also, who knows where the purple marten spends the winter? They stay a while with us in summer. Would appreciate any information on migratory birds.

"Any one interested in this neck of the woods, I will be glad to supply with any information I can. This is the land where it seldom snows, and where the snow-white cotton shines."

THE WEST

And What Do YOU Know About It?

Here is a chance to test, and, at the same time, increase your knowledge of the West. Take these questions now, one at a time, and write your answers down during the coming week. In the next issue, right here, at the bottom of the last page of the Round-up, you'll find all of the questions in this week's issue correctly answered. Compare your answers with the right ones and mark yourself accordingly. If you have read your WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE with care during the past years, you should have little trouble in getting mighty good marks on these questions, for nearly all of them are based on information given in articles and stories that have been printed in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Then get your best-thinking Stetson on, your pencil out, and go to it.

More questions next week.

1. What is the State flower of Texas?..... 2. When an Indian wishes to signal a neighboring tribe, how does he utilize smoke to carry his message?..... 3. What extensive mills at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, produce the "staff of life?"..... 4. A bay horse is colored..... 5. What spring in Fulton County, Arkansas, is the largest in the world?..... 6. Colorado is a Spanish word meaning..... 7. The Golden State is..... 8. What is a sway-backed horse?..... 9. Kansas is among our leading.....raising States. 10. When an Indian wants to forgive an injury what does he bury?.....

Answers to last week's questions. 1. Colorado. 2. Because it was admitted to the Union in 1876, on the one hundredth anniversary of the winning of America's independence. 3. "Ally" or "friend." 4. Lake Tahoe. 5. Pipe of peace. 6. By tying a hair tightly around one of his legs above the hoof. 7. The stalactite caves. 8. A yellowish brown. 9. The Missouri. 10. Diamonds.

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Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

FOLKS, this is Panama week. Seems like every other letter is postmarked Canal Zone, which is most unusual seeing as we've had only an occasional one from that part of the country all season long.

DEAR GANGSTERS: To those who are interested in the life which Americans lead in a land not intended as a home for them, a brief survey of conditions in general in the Canal Zone and Panama may be interesting.

The Canal Zone is the name given to that stretch of territory which borders the Canal. It is about forty-eight miles long and ten miles wide, extending exactly five miles on either side of the Canal. Ships from every country pass through the Canal and pay tolls according to their tonnage. Vessels owned and operated by the United States or the Panamanian and Columbia governments do not pay tolls.

The climate of Panama is not as hot as one might expect. The average temperature ranges around ninety degrees in the middle of the day and seventy degrees at night. Although the heat is oppressive during the middle of the day, the nights are cool and pleasant. There is no winter. Summer prevails the year round. There are but two seasons on the Isthmus: the wet and the dry.

There are well-equipped, modern schools. There is in addition a school for children of the Porto Rican troops stationed at Empire. For amusements there are golf links, tennis courts, volley ball, baseball and basket ball grounds at various places, while boxing is a popular sport with all ages.

There are no stores in the Canal Zone, but in each town there is a large government commissary where employees and army and navy personnel may purchase supplies of every sort. Instead of currency, coupon books are used and no one may purchase these except employees, members of the army and navy, and others who may have been granted the privilege.

Because of the importance of the Canal it is very strongly fortified. The military posts are Forts Randolph, Sherman, Davis, De Lesseps, Clayton, and Amador. The army aviation post is at France Field, and the submarine base and naval air station at Coco Sola. There are also army posts at Gatun, Empire, Galliard, Corozal, and Quarry Heights.

One of the largest drydocks in the world is located at Balboa. Man-eating sharks infest the ocean around Panama and make bathing dangerous except near the beaches. In the jungle wild animals abound: deer, zaina, or wild pig, tapir, conejo, wild cat, monkey, and sloth.

Now that I have interested you in Panama, do I get some letters? ADOLPH WIRTH.

Battery H, Second Coast Artillery, Fort Sherman, Canal Zone.

DEAR GANGSTERS: Most of you folks want to find out about working conditions in Panama. I've had a boatload of letters asking

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me this question, and I'm answering through The Tree. A tropical country is not the place for a man to come for a job. The ordinary work a native can do much cheaper than any other person could. In the Zone, of course, I do not know very much about jobs. Stenography, though, for one who can speak good Spanish as well as English, would pay very well, so I've been told.

About cattle and chickens—there are places where they can be raised, but there is no way of transportation. There are a few miles of railroad and cart roads, also pretty good horse trails, but there are a lot more of the bad trails. There are plenty of foot trails, too, over the mountains, where even the horses can't go. And, folks, think of having to pack windowpanes for thirty or forty miles on a horse! Starting a home and ranch in this part of the country isn't so easy.

We have a small plantation with a few acres of cane and a few coffee trees. It isn't much, Gangsters, but it keeps us pretty busy. Any one who comes here must expect to work mighty hard. MISS J. M. SMITH.

La Concepcion, Chiriqui, Panama.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: At the present time I am with a party in the jungles of the Republic of Panama, working on the survey. There is a lot I could say about Panama, about the Canal, about living conditions, weather, and the jungles. What is it you want to know, Gangsters? BERT BAKER.

Corozal, Canal Zone.

The Owl was much interested in this letter. I think you'll be too.

LISTEN, YOU WISE OLD OWL OF THE HOLLOW TREE: What is the name of the most Western town in the United States? This does not include territory. What is the name of the greatest deep-water harbor on the Pacific coast? This does not include Puget Sound or bays. What is the name of the most popular lumber on the Pacific coast?

Is there any one who can answer all of these questions? F. B. TICHENOR.

Box 2148, Portland, Oregon.

A lot of us would like to pack right up and start out for Arkansas.

DEAR HOLLOW TREE GANG: Arkansas is a wonder State, as any one who has ever seen the country will testify. Agriculturally speaking, we can raise almost anything here that can be raised anywhere in the United States. This State boasts the largest hardwood factory, the only diamond mine, and orchards second to none. It is called the "land of the big red apple"—the Ozark region—and Rogers, our home town, is the scene of the Annual Northwest Arkansas Apple Blossom Festival. Monte Ne, the little hamlet that we call home, is a picturesque summer resort, and is yearly the mecca of hundreds of fox hunters. Game is abundant, unlike most summer resorts, and the beauty spots of nature have not been molested.

If any of you-all decide to write to us, we'll send some real pictures of the hills and tell you anything we can. Have had some experience in nearly all of the kinds of work that goes on around here, including fruit packing, timber cutting, mining, prospecting, and hunting. In this country no one has to work hard. We can do all of our work in two days out of the week, and have the rest of the time to hunt and fish. If any one asks you where to find a heaven on earth, just you direct him to Arkansas. Now, somebody that wants to be real friendly with a couple of green Arkansawyers, just write us.

CALVIN AND CECIL WILLIAMS.

Route 1, Rogers, Arkansas.

"I'm glad I sent for the badge that acknowledges me a member of the best Gang in the world," says Rose Pedi, of Illinois.

Don't you want to wear the badge-membership emblem, too? Send twenty-five cents in coin or stamps to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, and state whether you wish the pin style or the button for the coat lapel.

Nineteen-year-old Texas lass.

DEAR GANG: I come from down Texas way, the South plains, to be exact, and I think this part of the country simply fine, except for the sand storms. Of the four States in which I have lived, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona, I think Arizona is my first choice and Texas my next.

Texas still boasts of a great many cattle ranches. About ten miles east of here is Double U Ranch. Beyond that where the cap

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rock breaks off into the lower country among the "sure-enough rough country," is the famous Slaughter outfit. Far to the northwest, about one hundred and twenty-five miles, lie the vast acres of the Matador Ranch. There are acres and acres of rolling prairie grassland.

I hope to get a letter from each of you girls who crave a faithful pen pal.

LILLIAN M. QUINSEY.

Tahoka, Texas, R. R. 2.

Blue Ridge Mountains Gangster.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a Virginian, born and raised in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. I'm a disabled veteran of the World War now; was one of the first to volunteer to go to France in 1917. I'd like to hear from some of the old Blue and Gray Division, Twenty-ninth, One Hundred and Sixteenth, or One Hundred and Fourteenth Infantry.

I came here to the Buckeye State with my folks after the war, and we are making our home here. I'm without friends, folks, so I'm turning to the Gang to find plenty of pen buddies. ROY S. LUNSFORD.

Hotel Normandie, 259 East Long Street, Columbus, Ohio.

DEAR GANG: I'm a young fellow eighteen, who'd like to go West and meet a pard, preferably a prospector, who has a prospecting trip in view. Let's see if I draw any luck, hombres. WALTER SIZER.

Box 42, Rochdale, Massachusetts.

From Oskosh, Wisconsin.

DEAR GANGSTERS: I live right on the main road that leads from the south to Wisconsin's famous playground, and can give a lot of information on that subject. Will be pleased to hear from you-all who are planning to tour this part of the country this summer.

Oshkosh, my home town, is a city of thirty-seven thousand inhabitants and is situated on the banks of Lake Winnebago. The Fox River divides the city, and during the spring and summer fishermen come here from all over the State. It is the only city that I know of where one can get good fishing by not walking over fifteen minutes from any part of the city. And, oh, such fish! Pike, pickerel, bass, and so forth.

Folks, I'll be glad to hear from any number of you Gangsters, whether you are tourists or not. EMIL C. HOEFFS.

236 Washington Block, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Tom Landy, General Delivery, Las Vegas, Nevada, has been roamin' considerably lately, but is back on the home range again, and wants all the hombres as are interested in an honest-to-goodness cowboy to write to him. He's punched cows in Oregon, California, and northern Nevada.

E. C. Gardner, 32 Pasley Road, Manor Place, Walworth, London, S. E., 17, England, has been all over Britain by road, and will be glad to exchange notes with all the Gangsters who want to hear from a Londoner.

Far-away Venezuela.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm in the oil business down in Venezuela, South America, and want a chance to spin my little lonesome yarn to friendly ears. DINTY MOORE.

Apartado 234, Maracaibo, Venezuela, South America.

This Gangster is from the North Dakota bad lands district.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My home is in the western part of North Dakota, and I love nothing better than I do the sagebrush-covered bad lands, with its countless trails and cedar-covered buttes. I know a good bit about horses, and if any of the boys are contemplating shipping horses East, I'll cheerfully tell you-all my mistakes and some of my experiences, for I've been through with a nice bunch of broken horses. Any mail addressed to Box 138, Saratoga Springs, and marked "forward," will reach me in North Dakota.

ALBERT F. BARTIK.

Box 138, Saratoga Springs, New York.

"My home is situated in the northeastern corner of Montana, overlooking the Horseshoe Basin," says Claire Kleemann, Box 70, Peerless, Montana. Miss Claire says that there are few families living in that little Horseshoe Basin, which is only six miles wide and eight miles long. The little town of Peerless is just outside of the basin, and it has only been in existence about two years. Claire is nineteen, and will welcome the opportunity of telling all about the Horseshoe Basin.

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WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

JUST about everybody is having a fling these summer days at the sports offered by the outdoor West. Woods and streams are calling, and we'll bet that the feel of feet on a bush trail or the pull of biceps on a wet paddle are a mighty welcome sensation to most of our readers. The good old fishing days are again in order, and Raymond G., of Albany, New York, has his rods all ready for a jaunt up into Canada where almost every stream offers a first-rate sporting chance.

"Can you tell me something about fishing up in Nova Scotia?" asks he. "What are the best streams? How does one reach them? What are the fishing regulations? And what is the price of an angler's permit?"

This Canadian province presents a double attraction to the fisherman, for there he can enjoy both deep-sea fishing and that of inland lakes and rivers. Although there are no broad rivers in Nova Scotia, there are countless streams stocked with trout. Then there are the Bras d'Or Lakes which lie across the center of Cape Breton, and Lake Rossignol, two as splendid sheets of water as any sportsman could desire. Brook trout, sea trout and salmon fishing are all available, while off the coast Raymond G. can harden his muscles as he stages some stirring battles with the tuna and fighting sword-fish.

This vacationist will find travel in the interior of Nova Scotia simple, and settlement road and bush road alike lead to good fishing territory. Farm supplies are always accessible. The Canadian National lines take the traveler to Truro and thence eastward, bringing him to Cape Breton and the Bras d'Or Lakes. Raymond G. will find in Nova Scotia two thousand square miles of country with no outposted lands or preserved rivers to curtail his adventures. From a seat in a canoe he'll cast his rod as he sails down streams as fresh and undisturbed as they were in pioneer times.

Fishing regulations are not rigorous.

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The open season for salmon is from February 1st to August 31st, except in the Islands of Cape Breton and in the streams flowing into the Straits of Canso, Chedabucto Bay, where the open season is from June 1st to October 15th. Artificial flies only may be used, and not more than thirty salmon may be taken in one week. The season for trout opens April 1st and lasts to September 30th. The limit catch is thirty in one day and not more than ten pounds. The open season for bass lasts from March 1st to September 30th. No bass weighing less than two pounds may be taken. The non-resident angling permit costs five "berries."

The great open spaces are calling not only vacationists, but also a lot of hombres who are looking for outdoor jobs. Bill McM., of Des Moines, Iowa, is thinking about hitting the trail to Alaska, which is interesting so many of our readers; but, like the canny Scot he is, Bill is investigating the lay of the land before he takes to the road. "Tell me, Mr. North, just what chances a chap has for picking up work in Alaska, and the wages paid. I want to go up there and I'm willing to work hard to make good, but I want to know just what odds I'd be up against before I start. What industry employs the greatest number of men?"

Until recently the largest employer of labor in Alaska was the United States Government, the laborers being employed in the construction of the railway from Seward to Fairbanks. The railway was completed in 1922, and the number of men now employed is limited to the work required for maintenance. To-day mining is the industry that gives work to the largest number of employees. However, the mines are scattered over a wide area and in no one place are more than a few hundred men employed. In fact, in most instances the laborers can be numbered by scores instead of hundreds. The Treadwell Mine near Juneau has been closed; the Alaska-Gastineau Mine, which formerly employed a large number of workers, has been abandoned; and the Alaska-Juneau mine now operating at Juneau employs only a few hundred men. At Willow Creek in the Matanuska district a number of small mines are active, but none of them employs many laborers. In the Kuskokwim some mining is in progress. In southeastern Alaska work may be found in the sawmills, and at least one paper-pulp mill is busily making pulp from Alaskan timber.

During the war, wages for common labor advanced and there has been but a slight reduction. At the Fairbanks Experiment Station the pay for farm labor, which rose to seven dollars during war time, is now six dollars and forty cents. Board is not included in wages. In the interior, board comes to about two dollars a day. There is at the present time no large enterprise under way in Alaska which requires an influx of labor, but this does not mean that young active men, such as Bill McM., who are not afraid of work cannot find jobs. Alaska needs settlers, and the hombre who takes up a homestead and develops it can always make a living and in time become independent. As yet markets for produce are local and settlers cannot expect to make a fortune in a short time. As the mines develop, a market will be created eventually which the local farmer can best supply.

Another of our readers who is casting around for some outdoor occupation is Warren K. "My health is not as good as it once was," writes this Chicagoan," and I must get away from the city and get out-of-doors. I've been told that a man can make a living out in Oregon raising rabbits. Is this true? And if so, what is the best locality to

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settle in? Is feed expensive? What are the best breeds of rabbits to stock a business with? Give me all the facts you can about this business as I am seriously thinking of taking it up."

An old-timer of the Beaver State writes me that Jackson County is the center of the rabbit-raising industry in Oregon. "And there are several good reasons," states he. "We have a mild climate, both in winter and summer. Feed is cheap and there is a home market for meat. With alfalfa hay selling from ten to twenty dollars per ton and barley from thirty to forty dollars, it is possible to average a net income of from eight to sixteen dollars per breeding doe for the year, while the fur-bearing breeds bring from two to three times this amount."

As one Westerner to another, I would advise Warren K. to invest in such breeds of rabbits as New Zealands, Chinchillas, American Blues, French Silvers, and Flemish Giants. Good stock from any of these breeds, if properly cared for, should show a satisfactory profit for the owner. Dressed rabbits bring a good price at the local markets and the skins sell for a variety of purposes. In fact so popular has this industry become out in the Beaver State that there is a rabbit breeders' association, known as the Southern Oregon Rabbit Breeders' Association, which holds monthly meetings in the city hall in Talent.

AIRPLANE AIDS STRANDED MOUNTAINEERS

WHEN the first cog-railroad train ascended Pikes Peak this spring, two men employees of the company operating the Summit House, on the mountaintop, made the trip and stayed there. Weather conditions were favorable, and they expected further supplies of provisions to be brought up to them on future trips of the train.

A few hours after the two had settled themselves at the summer resort hotel, a heavy blizzard and snowstorm came on, blocking the cog railroad and damaging the telephone line, so that the pair were entirely cut off from people below. Their food supply was sufficient for a few days, but it was feared that they might suffer hardship if their enforced stay on the mountaintop should be prolonged.

In order to relieve their plight, therefore, H. C. Lippiatt, a Los Angeles aviator, accompanied by his mechanic, A. C. Luz, undertook to fly over the peak and, in the course of the flight, to drop additional provisions to the marooned men. This was done after the pair had been on the mountaintop for a week, prisoners of the blizzard. As the great flying machine soared over the peak, food supplies were dropped, and the imprisoned men rushed to the roof of the Summit House to shout their thanks to their courageous helpers.

This flight by Lippiatt is said to be the first ever made over Pikes Peak in the spring or winter seasons. There have been two previous flights during the summer. After the flight, Lippiatt was quoted as saying that he had been caught in a treacherous air pocket over the chasm known as the Bottomless Pit, and his machine fell fifteen hundred feet before he could get it under control.

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MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

TALMADGE, LOUIS.—Of Dallas, Texas. Do you remember the pal that you met on the L. & N. train at Evansville, Indiana? Please write and let me know where you are, for I want to see you. Clark Fish, Box 95, Palm Harbor, Florida.

LEWIS, WILLIAM.—His father and mother died when he was a boy. Brought up by his aunt, Mrs. Mullen, of Sherryville, Iowa, who had a son, Miles. Left them and joined the army during the Civil War. The Mullen family moved to Kansas during his absence and have not heard from him since. He married Lucinda Day of Sherryville, upon his return. Any one knowing his whereabouts or his family please communicate with Miss Alice Lewis, 121 Oneida Street, Storm Lake, Iowa.

WILLIAMS, ELSIE MARIE.—Maiden name; married Dick West, from whom she was divorced later. Last heard of in 1925. Any one knowing her whereabouts please notify Mrs. Alfred Anderson, Greve, Montana.

WALSH, JAMES.—Worked on the river at Louisville, Kentucky. Later went to New York. Any information will be appreciated by the wife of Roy, his old friend. Nancy, 5120 Globe Avenue, Norwood, Cincinnati, Ohio.

WICKHAM, CLYDE S.—Last heard of six years ago. Thirty-nine years of age, a scar over the left eye; served a year in the World War in France and was wounded. His mother, Mrs. Rosetta Newman, 235 Monroe Street, Topeka, Kansas.

HOWARD, ERWIN S.—Left his home July 20, 1925, and has never been heard of since. Any one knowing his whereabouts please ask him to at least write to his mother. Dark hair and eyes, six feet tall, weighs one hundred and forty-two pounds. His mother, Mrs. Leon Price, Box 244, Newark Valley, Tioga County, New York.

WILLIAMSON, A. C. or **ALFRED.**—Or Birdie, his wife, and their son, Odell. Any one knowing their whereabouts please notify his mother or Alexander Williamson, Ralls, Texas.

McLAUGHLIN, ROY.—Fireman on the steamer "Southland," at Louisville, Kentucky. Later went to West Virginia. His wife, Elizabeth, would like to hear of his whereabouts. Mrs. Elizabeth McLaughlin, 5120 Globe Avenue, Norwood, Cincinnati, Ohio.

FEATHER, JOHN.—Left England about 1860 and went to Australia. Would like to hear from him or his children, as he is probably dead now. My father, Timothy Feather, was sent by the British government, as a railway builder, to New South Wales. Send any information to Phineas Feather, 168 Blue Hills Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut.

YARBRAUGH, JAMES FRANK.—Missing thirty-three years. Seventy-one years of age, married, and lived in Austin, Texas. His wife was Eda Meyers of Cameron, Texas, now dead. Two children, Leo and Derwood, my father. Any one knowing of their whereabouts please write to Grace Marie Yarbraugh, 821 Horace Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AINSWORTH, SANFORD or **LLOYD.**—His children are Florence and Harry. Any one knowing his whereabouts please notify his sister, Mrs. Frank Keeney, Box 263, Centerville, Michigan.

MAHONEY, JOHN.—His parents' address in southern Indiana can be obtained from Susie Mahoney, 1008 South Poplar, Centralia, Illinois.

KELLEY, EARL.—Any information concerning his whereabouts will be appreciated by his sister. Left for Florida. Tall, blue eyes, light hair, slim, twenty-one years of age. Mrs. C. J. Kiozara, 230 North Main Street, Seminole, Oklahoma.

MASSEY, VIRGIE.—Her second marriage name unknown. Has a daughter, Nina Baldwin. Her brothers and father wish to get in touch with her. Address Mr. Lester Massey, Southern Bell Telephone Company, Orlando, Florida.

PEIRCE, MRS. MARY.—Parted from her in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1912, after having lived together on Thirty-fourth Street in the rear of a family named Morgan. My name was Martha Hubbard then, but has been changed by marriage to Mrs. Martha Jordan. Her home at that time was Marion, Ohio, and she had a sister, Lillian Dodson. Any information will be appreciated by Mrs. Martha Jordan, 375½ Indiana Avenue, Toledo, Ohio.

SINCLAIR, COLIN.—Left his home in Toronto, Ontario, in 1912. Get in touch with your sisters; it is very important. W. and M., in care of this magazine.

HUGH.—Please write to me, for I need you. Dadie in Alaska. Have pictures for you. Dellett, in care of this magazine.

HOULIHAN, ANNIE.—Resided with her sister, Mrs. Giles, at 563 Third Avenue, New York City, thirty-five years ago. Mrs. Giles had a son who delivered letters around Third Avenue and Thirty-sixth and Thirty-seventh Streets, East Side. Mrs. M. J. Lennon, 25 Station Street, Pentwynmawr, Newport, Monmouthshire, England.

BURNS, JIM, JOHN, and **ANNIE.**—Lived on Thirty-fifth Street near Second Avenue. Annie worked with Millie Cook thirty-five years ago. Please write all information concerning her to Mrs. N. J. Lennon, 25 Station Street, Pentwynmawr, Newport, Monmouthshire, England.

DUGGAN, MRS. DANNY.—Nee Annie Mulstay. Resided on Second Avenue, between Fortieth and Fiftieth Streets, thirty-five years ago. Had a brother, Owen, and a sister, Mamie. Write all information to Mrs. M. J. Lennon, Pentwynmawr, Newport, Monmouthshire, England.

INALLEY, EDDIE.—Last heard of in Saskatchewan, Canada, six years ago. Twenty-eight years old, blue eyes, brown hair, large build. His married sister would like to hear from him. Mrs. Ivan Ostby, Gibbs, Idaho.

RUNKLE, WILLIAM SYLVESTER.—Stationed at Fort Rosecrans, California, in 1922. Left there for Fort Kamehameha, Hawaii, in 1923. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write to Hazel Mullen, Box 131, Corvallis, Oregon.

SCHULTZ, MRS. FRANK.—Nee Rosie Moffet. Formerly of Albia, Iowa, and Cherry County, Nebraska. Please write to your nephew, Chester Moffet, 9910 One Hundred and Eleventh Street, Edmonton, Canada.

MOFFET, CHAUNCEY.—Last heard of at Galesburg, Illinois, with the railway. Kindly communicate with me, for I have been trying to find you for fourteen years. Chester Moffet, 9910 One Hundred and Eleventh Street, Edmonton, Canada.

CULLEY, CHARLES H.—With the fleet when it came into San Francisco Bay about 1908 and 1909. Forty-five years of age. Am seeking his address. Mrs. May Bell, 1245 Fifty-third Avenue, Oakland, California.

COOMBS, MRS.—Come home to us, mamma. Left home on February 3, 1927, for Fort Worth, Texas. Tall, blond. Little R. B. not expected to live long; all heartbroken. Your daughter, Ethel Coombs, Cisco, Texas.

KEMP, NOAH LELAND.—Left Colorado Springs when a little boy. Last heard of in Wichita, Kansas. Write to your sister, Mrs. Stella Kemp Webster, 3640 San Franco Street, Los Angeles, California.

SMITH, MRS. LULU F.—Nee Schwartz or Bradley. Last known address 2053 California Street, Denver, Colorado. Five feet ten inches tall, weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds, forty-one years of age; lost right arm when eight years of age. Write to Morris Schwartz, 3518 Congress Street, Chicago, Illinois.

PUGH, H. V.—Disappeared December 11, 1911, in Wheeling, West Virginia. Coal miner. Dark eyes; weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Wife's name Marie. Please write to Mrs. Mary Snodgrass, in care of this magazine.

MEYERS, ROBERT S.—Please come, write, or telephone, at my expense. Dolly.

LEE.—Write to 7030 South Eighth Street, Yakima, Wyoming. J. E.

SMITH, JAMES.—Dad, please write wherever you are and we will help you. I am to be trusted, you know, and will send your things. You did not get answer at Indiana, 318 Plum Street. Pard.

LEARY, ROBERT R.—Worked with him in Lunenburg, Massachusetts, fifteen years ago. He left to go home to his father, who owned a ranch in San Joaquin Valley, also in Death Valley, California. I want his address. Kendal W. Rockwood, Box 205, Port Orange, Florida.

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TAYLOR, COLEMAN and **RUTH.**—Last heard of in 1921, at La Harba, California. Any one knowing their whereabouts please write to Dan C. Gossage, Box 623, Atwood, California.

DARE, WILLIAM HARVEY.—Formerly lived on Harland Avenue, Evansville, Indiana. Shell shocked in last war. About twenty-five years of age, tall, dark eyes and hair. We need you; mother is blind and worried about you. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Marion Irene Wilson, 1609 Seventh Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

OGLE, RAYMOND.—Formerly of Malta. Write to Floyd Tuttle, 2414 Fourth Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

COLBY, LEMUEL EDWARD and **LUCY H.**—Both about seventy years of age. Last heard of in El Paso, Texas, about three years ago. He sold "Cloudcroft Hot Tamales" from a basket covered with black oilcloth. May be in San Antonio, Fort Worth, Dallas, Texas. B. G. U., in care of this magazine.

W. L.—If you love your baby, please write for her sake to me. E., in care of this magazine.

KUCERA, ADOLPH.—Father is dead. Please communicate with your sister, Anna S. Kucera, 673 Johnson Street, Portland, Oregon.

EDERA.—Still love you. Understand and forgive you. Please write to your husband, Ray Davis, 454 Deming Place, Chicago, Illinois.

BARRETT, JOHN THOMAS and **AMOS.**—I would like to get in touch with my father and uncle. My father may be living in Arkansas, Oklahoma, or Louisiana. My children are Chester E., Edith B., Ora, and Lydia. Any one having any information will kindly write to Chester E. L. Barrett, 2340 South Phoenix Avenue, West Tulsa, Oklahoma.

HOGGARD, H. H.—At Courtney, Oklahoma, in July, 1921. Any information concerning his whereabouts will be appreciated. Please write to N. S., in care of this magazine.

ROGERS, JOHN.—Please let your children hear from you once more. Write to J. L. R., in care of this magazine.

Mrs. G. A. M.—Won't you please write to me and let me know how life is treating you? I am still unchanged. Communicate through this magazine or write to Mike, at the old address.

ECROYD, ANNIE, nee **DANN.**—She left Montreal, Canada, years ago and went to live in Missouri on a farm. Any one knowing her whereabouts please communicate with William H. Edwards, Box 382, El Monte, California.

LE ROY, ROBERT.—About thirty-five years of age, brown eyes, brown hair, partly gray. Five feet eight or nine inches tall, weighs one hundred and forty-five pounds. Last heard of in Los Angeles, California, but believed to be in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Please notify Mrs. Edna Slayton, 2390 West Wilshire, Fullerton, California.

EDWARDS, JOHN.—Forty-five years of age, partly gray, blue eyes, slightly built, weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Was on the Federal and also on the police force in San Diego and Los Angeles, California. Worked for the Yellow Cab Company in both cities. His divorced wife is in Los Angeles. Please notify Mrs. E. Slayton, 2390 West Wilshire, Fullerton, California.

TEMPLE, HARRY LEE.—Want information concerning him. Will be fifty years of age this May. Very important news for him. Would like to get in further touch with the cowboy who responded to my ad before. Please write to Juanita Evelyn Temple, R. D. No. 2, Lorain, Ohio.

HENRY.—Please come back to me. I long for you all the time and want you back with me. I am suffering for what I have done to you. Please forgive me, and write to the Bangor address, or let me come to you. Ruth, in care of this magazine.

SMITH, LOLA, PAYNE, LEONARD, and **GRANDVILLE.**—Last time we were all together was when our mother died fourteen years ago in New Hope, Texas. My mother's maiden name was Susie Payne, and my father's name was Joe Smith. Lola is twenty, Payne is twenty-three and married to an Indian girl in Oklahoma, Leonard is about twenty-one, and Grandville is fourteen. I am eighteen now, and very anxious to get in touch with my brothers and sister. Any one knowing their whereabouts please write immediately to Mrs. W. E. Ridley, 1336 Moline Avenue, Aurora, Colorado.

POWELL, Mrs. CATHERINE, nee **LEEDY.**—Twenty-five years of age, blue eyes, brown hair, five feet four inches tall, weighs nearly one hundred and forty pounds. Last heard from in Oregon in 1926 on September 30th. Any one knowing her present whereabouts or any information pertaining to her since that time please write to Charley Brown Shafter, P. O. Box 1170, Honolulu, Hawaii.

O'NEIL, GEORGE.—Justice of peace at Haskelle in 1909. Bought oil-land leases near Tulsa and Muskogee during 1912. Write to M. W., in care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, ANTHONY.—About forty-four years of age. Left his home, wife, and children seventeen years ago in Chicago, Illinois. His parents and wife are now dead, but his children would like to get in touch with him. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write or wire to Mrs. Hanley Romans, Box 45, Hines, Wisconsin.

BLAISDELL, VERA M.—Disappeared on September 11, 1925, with her father from home. Will any one who knows of her whereabouts please write to her mother, E. M. B., in care of this magazine.

ANNA.—Let me know what you are going to do. Write to Harry, in care of this magazine.

RAY, W. T. or **BILLY.**—Sometimes called Walter. Important news is awaiting you. Write to your nephew, Ray Smith, Merrill Route, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

MAUDE, HANNAH.—Please write to me at "Western Story Magazine." Have moved to the country, your sister, Helen Brower.

ELLAR, M. C. P.—I will always be glad to hear from you. Please write to me, for I almost never go home. Send to Jim C., in care of this magazine.

BRADLEY, LESTER.—Known as Harold. Please write to your niece, Ophelia, in care of this magazine.

KINDER, LEVI and **SARAH.**—Would like to know the address of any of their children. They formerly lived at Eagleville, Harrison County, Missouri, but they afterward moved to Kansas. I am one of their cousins who lived in Ohio at one time. H. L. Blough, 326 East Monterey Street, Romona, California.

WERETHERELL, W. and **L. C.**—Have not seen them in twenty years. I will appreciate any help which can be given me by the readers. Write to Mrs. W. F. Mabbs, Lockesburg, Arkansas.

MITAL, JOHN.—Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan. Please write, as we would like to hear from you very soon. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write to Mary Mital, Youngsville, Pennsylvania.

KRAMAS, REBECCA, HARRY, and **MAMIE.**—Last heard from in Lorraine County, California. Any information will be appreciated by Mrs. N. A. Hance, R. 1, Box 139, La Habra, California.

CRIST, GUY ROBERT.—If you see this ad please come to us immediately, for I am heartbroken and need you. Clifford has been ill and we want you with us. Katie, 417 W. Brady, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

C. B. M.—I love you as always. I am giving you until the end of June to do something, then if not I will take drastic measures, which I wish to avoid. Very sadly, Robin, in care of this magazine.

BARRIS, THOMAS.—A long-lost brother. I was born in Quincy, although I do not know in what State. From a New York orphanage I was sent to one in Milwaukee, from which I was adopted in April, 1892. I am very anxious to get in touch with my brother, and want any one who knows of his whereabouts to write to Mrs. Mary Agnes Gehl, in care of this magazine.

ALBERT, THOMAS and **RAYMOND.**—They are the sons of Xavier and Frank Albert of somewhere in Canada. The last time I saw Thomas was on the morning of his wedding, and Raymond was last heard of in St. Marie Hospital, Lewiston, Maine, but is supposed to be somewhere in the West at the present time. Any one who knows of the whereabouts of either of these men please write to their brother, Frank, in care of this magazine.

BANKS, JENNIE and **GROVER.**—Lived near Drumright, Oklahoma, in 1914. Will any one who knows her whereabouts please communicate with me, for I am very anxious to get in touch with her. She was a mother to me for a time after my own died. Send all information concerning her to Opal Leona, in care of this magazine.

YOKUM, JOHN W.—Last heard of in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1923. Please help me to find him, or if he sees this himself, please write to Opal Leona, in care of this magazine.

DOLPH, JESSIE MARVIN.—Age seventeen years in June. Last seen in Danville, Illinois, when he was four years old. He has two brothers, Alva and Russell Dolph, and a sister, Goldie. My mother's name was Mary Ellen Dolph. Any one knowing of the whereabouts of any of this family please notify Mrs. C. Donnelly, Wilmington, Illinois.

WILLIAMS, RUDIE.—Left Olney, Texas, on July 3, 1926. Light-brown hair, gray eyes, scar on right cheek, weighs one hundred and seventy pounds. His wife is very anxious to see him again. Please come home at once. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write immediately to Rolls, North Route, Box 103, Texas.

GEORGE, DONALD A.—He was last heard of in 1920 while serving with the Third Army Replacement Depot at Coblenz, Germany. His home is at Newton, Upper Falls, Massachusetts. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please get in touch with John C. Frizzell, Box 372, Brownsville, Texas.

SALVISBERG, WILLIAM.—He was last heard of in 1920 while serving with the Quartermaster's Corps at Coblenz-Lutzel, Germany. Before he went to Germany his home was in Madison, Wisconsin. Any information concerning him will be appreciated by his friend, John C. Frizzell, Box 372, Brownsville, Texas.

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